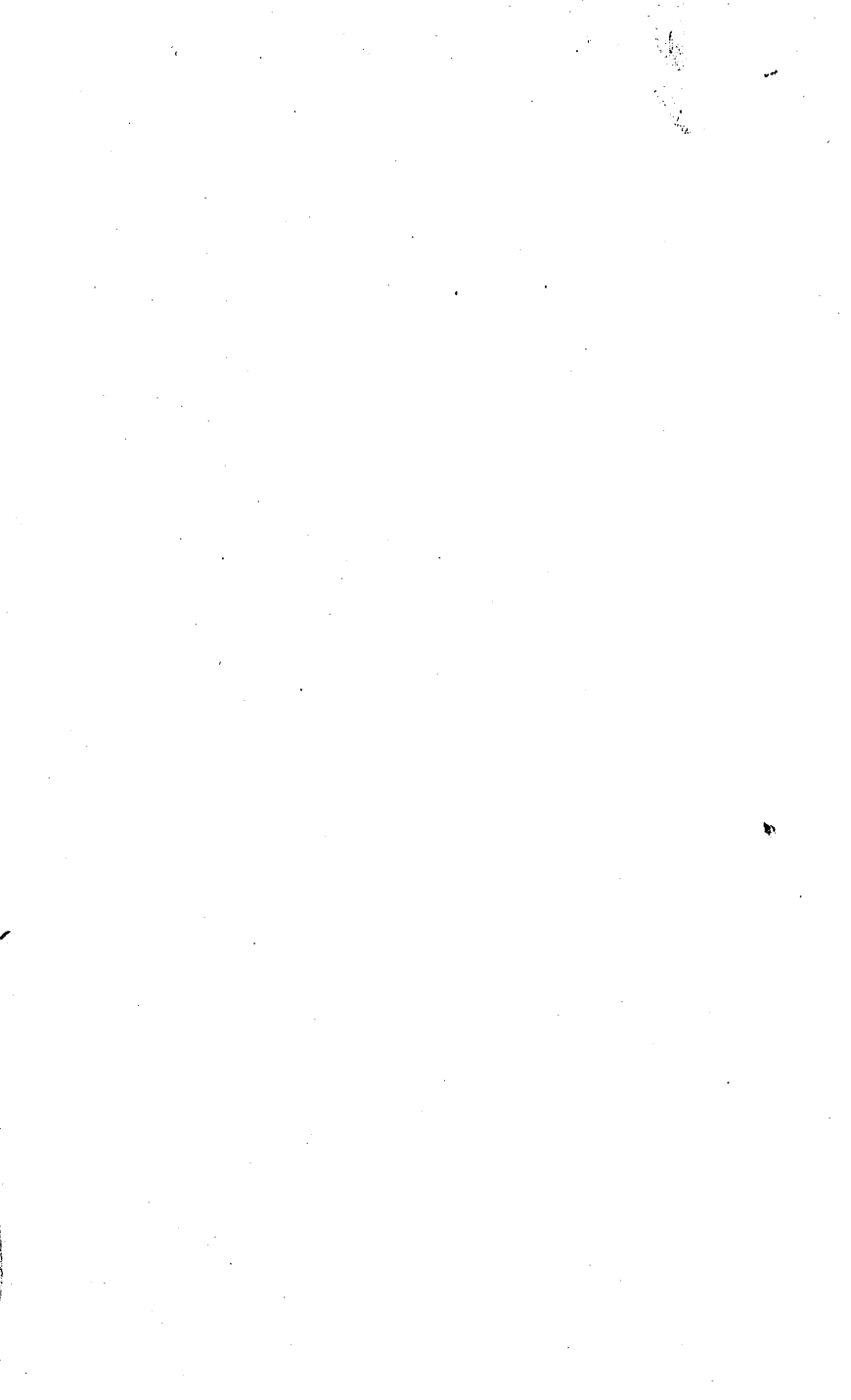


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LIVES OF THE PROPHETS

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THE LATER HISTORY OF ISRAEL TOLD
IN A SERIES OF BIOGRAPHIES OF THE
WRITING PROPHETS

BY

STEPHEN L. CAIGER, B.D.

AUTHOR OF

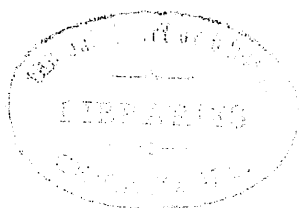
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PREFACE

By the Principal of Derby Training College

THESE *Lives of the Prophets* cannot fail to interest the general reader, and will be invaluable to teachers and students. Here is shown the continuity of religious development through the confusion and vicissitudes of eight hundred years of Jewish history, the ten separate chapters, with their overlapping chronological charts, presenting a thrilling story of adventure and failure, of struggle and achievement.

The writer's profound knowledge of the later history of Israel is evident, but not obtrusive. The book is written throughout in an easy, graphic style; it is lit up by touches of humour; it abounds in passages of vivid description; and it provides a background and setting for many of the well-known figures of the Old Testament.

Mr. Caiger has taught Scripture to students in a Training College for several years, and knows that no successful Scripture teaching can be done unless the teacher reads and re-reads his Bible, and learns by personal contact with the ancient text to understand its sacred message. The prime value of this book is that it will send many a student and teacher back to the Bible itself.

H. K. HAWKINS.

DERBY, 1936.

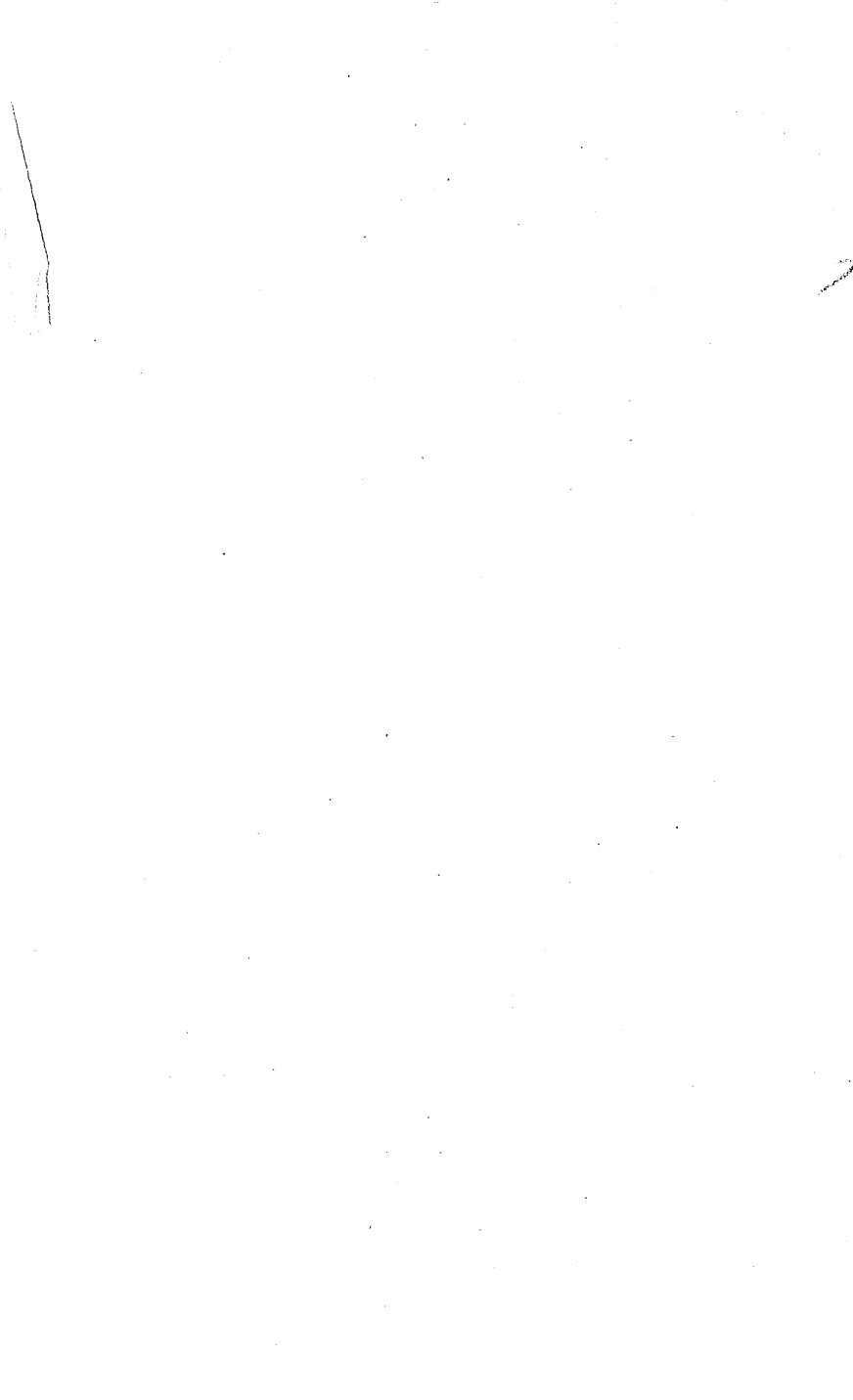


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The dates bracketed after each chapter refer not to the time during which the Prophet flourished, but to the period of history covered by the chapter. Throughout the work, the chronology in Oesterley and Robinson's *History of Israel* (1932) is accepted.

NOTE.—Each of the chapters of this book is written so as to be complete in itself. They are obtainable separately in pamphlet form.



INTRODUCTION

THE Old Testament is the story of a nation which, more than any other, believed in the reality of God, and took Him into account in every department of the national life. To the Israelites, in fact, nothing else was quite so real as God: they had, in the well-known phrase, a unique "genius for religion," and were dominated in everything by the presence of the Unseen Power. This is not to say that they always understood, far less that they always did, the Will of the Lord; but they could never escape from the thought of it—when all was said and done, God mattered most.

By the writers of the sacred books of Israel this spirit, so characteristic of the race in general, is exhibited in its quintessence. They have but one main interest in life—God; the hero of the story is not this man or that, but—God; their only criterion of composition, whether literary, historical, or scientific, is—will it lead men to God? It is a spirit very alien to the often purposeless curiosity of the modern mind, but we shall never appreciate the Old Testament writers until we grasp their point of view, and realize how profoundly uninterested they were in knowledge that had no religious content; or, on the other hand, how prone they were to find a religious content in much that we should regard as "nothing to do with religion." For, in truth, they had, at any rate in the earlier stages of their development, little conception of our modern

watertight distinction between sacred and profane, secular and religious.

Utterly misleading, therefore, must be the attempt to rewrite Biblical history solely from the modern "scientific" point of view, as though the motives which may have influenced European civilization and progress must have been equally important among the Hebrews, or, indeed, among the Semitic peoples of the ancient East in general. The history of Israel, at any rate, defies all attempts to reduce it to a mere struggle for bread-and-butter and "a place in the sun." Strange though it seem, religion meant infinitely more to the Jews than trade, commerce, territorial expansion, competitive nationalism, political autonomy, parity in armaments, even than life itself, and to squeeze Biblical history into such mass-production moulds is as unscientific as it is Philistine.

It is almost as bad to try to re-tell the history of Israel without reference to her men of God, the prophets, or with reference to them only in footnotes and small type. To treat it merely as a saga of national warriors, petty kings, and tribal movements is to de-vitalize the whole thing, and indeed to deprive it of nearly all its interest. For what after all was Israel from the standpoint of *Welt-politik*?—a tiny twig on an inconsiderable branch of the great Semitic tree! The prophets, the prophetic point of view, the motives they represented and instilled, were within the very life-stream of Hebrew history. Practically all that we know about those far-off days we owe to them. Nor is this a case where we have to disentangle "fact" from prophetic "fiction"; for

the prophets and their disciples not only wrote that history—they made it.

Abraham was a prophet, plucking his people from the polytheism of Chaldæa to give them the religious freedom of Canaan. Moses was a prophet, gathering his clans around the ark of Jehovah, and teaching them the Law of the Lord. Joshua, Gideon, Samuel, were prophets into whose hands God had seen fit to place a sword. Two thousand years later the Semitic race was still able to throw up a prophet of very much the same type in Mohammed, the fountain-head of all authority—military, civil, religious—among his people. Indeed, even in our own day the dervishes and Mahdis of Islam perpetuate in many respects the spirit of the earlier prophets of Israel.

Of course, as time went on, the tendency to specialization of function visible in all progressive communities began to circumscribe the strictly prophetic sphere of action. But, to the end, all authority in Israel was conceived as emanating from God, and the prophets were recognized as peculiarly in touch with Him. They spoke, not as human personalities, but as the mouthpiece of God—"Thus saith the Lord." King, priest, lawyer, scribe, all held their position by Divine sanction, and were liable to be overruled at any time by a direct revelation of the Divine Will. It is this pervading sense of responsibility to the Supreme Being which made the Old Testament what it has ever since remained, a unique treasury of devotional history, literature, and law; and which bestowed upon the prophets of Israel an influence which no other Men of God in any other community of men have attained. It follows that

the only way to approach and to appreciate the Book is by the path of prophecy; and it is scarcely too much to claim that the course of Hebrew history may be best understood as a series of biographies of the prophets.

As a specialized profession they date, perhaps, from Samuel (about 1000 B.C.), when the Philistine menace evoked fiery bands of "seers" to preach a holy war against the heathen. As time passes the names of a few stand out above the rest—Nathan, who had a place at David's court; Gad, the "King's Seer"; Ahijah the Shilonite; Shemaiah, Jehu, Micaiah, Zechariah, and so on. With the commanding personality of Elijah, this period of professional prophecy reached its pinnacle. He remained for all later Jewry the type *par excellence* of a prophet of Israel, the representative of Divine Revelation, associated with Moses (the representative of Divine Law) and the Messiah Himself at the transfiguration of our Lord. The Biblical narrative of the ninth century of Hebrew history is little more than the biographies of Elijah and his successor Elisha. They were the living embodiment of the presence of God: before them kings trembled and the populace stood in awe.

The prophets of the eighth century¹ were the lineal descendants of their forerunners of the ninth. There is no break in the authentic prophetic tradition. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to look upon Amos and Hosea as inaugurating a new

¹ The expression "eighth century B.C." is a customary, though somewhat confusing, way of saying "the seven hundreds"—i.e., 799-700 B.C. Similarly, of course, the "seventh century" is 699-600, and so on.

epoch in prophecy, the epoch of the "writing prophets." It is not simply that their prophecies were written down with pen and ink, so that we know exactly what they said. But the very fact of their literary mode of expression must have influenced both the method and the matter of their work. Great is the power of the written word, both over the writer and him who reads. It may even become a tyranny. But the writing prophets of Israel wrote while the art and the inspiration were still fresh in the world, and there is something about the productions of Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the rest which no other extant literature can claim.

From the modern critical point of view it must be admitted that these writings are somewhat tantalizing. The entire absence (in the original) of pagination, date, chapter divisions, or even (in many cases) the name of the author, makes it difficult oftentimes to discover what their message is all about. Fortunately for the general reader, the labours of two centuries of highly expert scholarship have succeeded in rearranging the pages in their right order, and detecting at least approximately the hands that wrote them. Anyone who wishes to understand the reasons for this or that conclusion of the Higher Critics (as they are called) must turn to the commentaries. In this unpretentious volume we shall not even breathe the names of Wellhausen, Driver, Oesterley, or Robinson. Humbly we take their general point of view for granted, and merely try to build up a coherent edifice from the loose stones they have left lying about, using perhaps a little imagination for mortar, and exercising at times a certain freedom of choice where doctors disagree.

CHAPTER I

AMOS

It is probable that as a general rule the prophets of Israel were past their early youth before venturing on their public ministry. Among the Jews the age of thirty was looked upon as the threshold of manhood, and our Lord and John the Baptist were perhaps conforming to well-understood precedent when "being about thirty years old"¹ they began to preach. Behind the earliest utterances of the prophets, therefore, lay a considerable period of meditation and experience, and we shall understand their message more fully if we try to reconstruct their early environment.

The prophet Amos, who received his call about the middle of the eighth century before Christ, must have been born about the beginning of that century, say in 805 B.C. His parents were probably small farmers living at Tekoa, an inconsiderable village of Judah on the barren ridge about twelve miles south of Jerusalem.

As a small boy he must often have heard them recalling memories of the ill-omened House of Omri, of the tyrant Ahab, of the dogs that licked up the blood of the idolatrous Jezebel, of the courage of Jehoiada in slaying that last of Ahab's line, the bloodstained Athaliah. He must also have heard much of that terrible Assyrian enemy which, from the time of Ahab and Jehu onwards,

¹ Luke 3²³.

had made a practice of sudden savage raids upon Northern Palestine, although they had now (at the time of Amos' boyhood) practically ceased from troubling.

No doubt from his earliest years the young prophet-to-be had been brought up in an atmosphere of stern piety and unswerving loyalty to the one and only true God, Jehovah. For King Joash of Judah had done his best to eradicate from the southern kingdom the last traces of Baal-worship,¹ restoring the Temple in Jerusalem to something like its former glory and prestige.²

As the boy grew up, however, the eyes of all men must have turned more and more towards Samaria, capital of the sister kingdom of Israel in the north, where under King Jehoash a remarkable revival of prosperity seemed to be taking place. For more years than one cared to number, Israel had groaned under the heel of Hazael and the Ben-Hadads of Damascus, capital of Syria. But now the repeated assaults of Assyria from the far East had weakened the power of Damascus, and Israel was in consequence beginning to shake herself free. There were strange stories of that great and almost legendary character Elisha wielding the thunderbolts of the Lord of Hosts on behalf of Israel against her enemy, a host in himself.

Doubtless young Amos had more than once seen Elisha, and listened to his voice as he spoke again of "the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof."³ We may be quite sure that the boy

¹ 2 Kings 11¹⁷.

² 2 Kings 12¹.

³ 2 Kings 2¹².

was not among those unfortunate children who saw in the prophet's age-bent figure and bald head only a thing to mock at.¹ From the first he must have revered the prophets of the Lord, though little dreaming that he himself would one day join their ranks, and he was probably old enough to appreciate the loss when news came that the grand old man had breathed his last.

To the child Amos the prophets of Israel were almost as familiar a feature as the monks and friars to a child of the Middle Ages. Though the names of but few have come down to us, it is clear that the preaching prophets of this period were to be numbered by scores, if not by hundreds. Since the day when Saul had temporarily attached himself to the prophetic bands, they had grown enormously in prestige and organization. Originally formed at the time of the Philistine emergency to whip up the national spirit of the Hebrews against the infidel, the prophetic guilds had by this time entrenched themselves in a more settled position amongst their countrymen. When the clash of arms died down, they still declared a state of national emergency, a holy war against Baal, Moloch, Milcom and all other idolatrous rivals of the One True God; social unrighteousness was still to be denounced; and the glories of Israel's past could still be sung.

Thus by the time of Amos the prophets had attained almost what we should call a professional status:² they were recognized as divinely licensed

¹ 2 Kings 2²³.

² For the scriptural references establishing the statements of this and the following paragraphs see A. W. F. Blunt, *The Prophets of Israel*, pp. 20 f.

ministers of the Word, and allowed exceptional privileges by people, priest, and king. Doubtless there survived many of the older dervish-like type, given to strange gestures and outlandish modes of expression, living in ascetic solitude like hermits, or roving abroad with staff and alms-bag to preach some fiery Jihad against this or that abomination. That they were readily recognizable for what they were is clear from several hints in the Bible story, whether by their peculiar dress or by some tonsure-like mark they bore. Such were "the friars" of the movement.

But many seem to have resembled rather the monks than the friars, being organized in regular communities, living in specially built houses, owing tacit obedience to superiors. They were not, however, celibate. Indeed, the communities included wives, who were also acknowledged as "prophetesses." And there must have been children. The expression "sons of the prophets" is often merely a Hebrew expression for "members of the prophetic guilds," but it must also have had a literal meaning—sons who were looking forward to following in their fathers' footsteps. Yet the profession could never, by its very nature, become merely hereditary like the Priesthood, and there was still room, as we shall see, for a recruit of unmistakable vocation.

The prophets did more than preach. There were apparently some—we might almost call them the Dominicans of the movement—whose task it was to compose or to collect the records of past prophecy, in its widest sense, and to cast them into literary form. For it is almost certain that we owe to the prophetic schools the conception of

that library of sacred writings which became our Old Testament, and which has survived its unknown scribes by nearly three thousand years.¹ It is strange to reflect that while Amos was tending his herds on the slopes of Tekoa, within a day's journey, perhaps at Kirjath-Sephir (Scribe-Town) or within the walls of Jerusalem itself, may have been many little cells where eager writers of almost incredible industry and literary skill were occupied in transcribing from ancient tablets and skins the story of the Creation, of the Patriarchs, of Moses, Joshua, Judges, and the rest.

In this invaluable work the prophets of the southern kingdom had taken the lead. Their version of the Pentateuch, known to scholars as the "Jehovistic" or "J" narrative, can still be distinguished by experts within our present text, and existed in its written form at least a generation before the birth of Amos. But the prophets of the north had not lagged far behind, with their independent "E" or "Elohistic" version of the same traditions. It is probable that both documents were completed by the beginning of the eighth century, though it may have required many more years to bring them into general currency.

How far these early writings were known to Amos we cannot be sure. That he was familiar with the gist of the ancient story is clear from various passages in his Book. Thus, the men of Judah *have rejected the law of the Lord, after which their fathers did walk . . . Yet destroyed*

¹ For evidence concerning the literary activity of the prophets see C. F. Kent, *The Growth and Contents of the Old Testament*, pp. 31 f.

*I the Amorite before them.*¹ Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness.² . . . I have overthrown some among you, as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.³ . . . That devise for themselves instruments of music, like David.⁴ and so on. In all probability Amos could refer to some sort of Bible.

Yet that it was not word for word the same Bible that we have to-day, or that the later prophets possessed, is clearly shown by the well-known passage of Amos which was quoted by St. Stephen in his dying speech:⁵ *Did ye bring unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?*⁶ Here the context expects the answer No, which shows that Amos was unaware of the later tradition of wilderness sacrifice as contained in the completed Pentateuch. He goes on to contrast the absence of sacrifices in Israel's best days with the elaborate ceremonies which degenerate latter-day Israel offered even to foreign gods: *Yea, ye have borne Siccuth your king, and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves.*⁷ Here the text is uncertain, as a comparison with St. Stephen's quotation of the passage clearly proves, but the prophet's meaning is clear—some sacrifices, even when offered in the Name of Jehovah, may be little better than idolatry.

Before going any further, it may be as well to warn the reader that in quoting the Old Testament prophets, the writers of the New Testament often appear to give the general sense of their message, rather than an exact reproduction of

¹ 2⁴, 9.

² 2¹⁰.

³ 4¹¹.

⁴ 6⁵.

⁵ Acts 7⁴².

⁶ 5²⁵.

⁷ 5²⁶.

their words. This is generally due to the fact that they quoted from the Greek (Septuagint) translation of the Scriptures, and not from the original Hebrew. The point has puzzled not a few.

Amos may have lived to see his own prophecies reduced, as they say, to writing. And reduced is a good word here, for we may be sure he had much more to say than is actually recorded. Towards the end of his life the art of writing had become widely known in the Holy Land,¹ and the prophetic guilds must have been busier than ever. No doubt they regretted now that they had not taken more copious notes of the prophecies of Elijah and Elisha, and when a man of such outstanding character as Amos commenced to utter his solemn warnings and rebukes, everything was ready—the time, the place, and the materials for writing them down.

That he wrote them with his own hand would seem, in view of his antecedents, to be unlikely. Perhaps, like the lama in *Kim*, he had a faithful *chela* who carried the offering basket and wrote down his master's words. Perhaps in after years Amos himself joined one of the prophetic monasteries and reported his utterances to the scribes. Maybe some cultured admirer followed him round with parchment-roll and pen. At any rate, it is to the organized prophetic schools that we owe the publication and preservation of his famous prophecies.

Of the mechanical details we have a fairly

¹ For the evidence of this and of other archæological statements see the present author's *Bible and Spade* (*passim*).

clear picture. By this time the "tables" or clay tablets of an earlier age, imprinted in the cuneiform script with a stylus of wood or bone, had been superseded, except perhaps for official purposes, by more convenient rolls of papyrus imported from Egypt, or by prepared skins similar to parchment and written upon with pen and ink. The type of script in use is shown by the Moabite Stone and by the Siloam inscription of Hezekiah, the first a hundred years earlier and the second some fifty years later than the call of Amos. It is a derivative of the Phœnician script, usually known as "square" Hebrew, and the direct ancestor of that used in modern Jewry. The Assyrian reliefs show that even at this early period some similar method of writing was in use for commercial purposes, and its advantages over the clumsy cuneiform are obvious.

We may picture Amos, therefore, engaged in the time-honoured task of tending his sheep and goats upon the pastures of Tekoa, or absent-mindedly gathering the fruit of the "sycomore" (wild fig) shrubs growing on the slopes, while all the time his ears were tingling with the words of some passing prophet, his eyes alight as they dwelt on the dimly seen Mount of Olives to the north, and his heart on fire with stories of the glorious past and hopes of a still more glorious future for the chosen people of the Lord.

Often the thoughts of the young shepherd must have sped beyond Jerusalem to that far-famed city of Samaria whence came more and more highly coloured stories of luxury, pomp, and power. The southern kingdom, even the Temple of Jehovah itself, had been despoiled by King

Jehoash of Israel to enrich his already overflowing coffers. The present king of Israel, Jeroboam II., had followed up his predecessor's victories, and made himself almost a second Solomon for wealth and power. His palaces of ivory and the insensate prodigality of his court were maintained by heartless impositions upon the poorer classes in Israel herself. The splendid shrines of the Lord at Beth-el and Dan, where calves of shining gold still symbolized His majesty, were served by faithless priests whose splendid ceremonial and interminable sacrifices utterly failed to hide their lack of all true reverence or righteousness of heart.

As a patriot, too, the young shepherd must have been stung to the quick by the northern kingdom's overweening pride. Amaziah king of Judah had been called a "thistle"¹ by the arrogant Jehoash of Samaria, and trodden under foot, as the impoverished Temple and the broken walls of Jerusalem still showed. All this was years ago, but Jeroboam of Israel had kept his heel firmly on the neck of the ailing king of Judah, Azariah (Uzziah); and, with Syria in decline, the southern state had none to help them against their brother the enemy. Even the Assyrian invader, who about the year of Amos' birth (under Adadnirari III.) seemed likely to divert the attention of Israel, had unaccountably vanished from the horizon, save for a couple of hasty raids in 773 B.C. and 765 B.C.

Jeroboam's astounding successes and prosperity at the expense of his southern neighbour must have seemed all the stranger because in Judah there had been some attempt at least to uphold the worship of the Lord, while in Israel irreligion,

¹ 2 Kings 14⁹.

idolatry, and unrighteousness of every kind were rife almost as in the days of Jezebel.

This backsliding from the faith of their fathers was a poor return for all the help which Jehovah and His prophets had given to the people of Israel. Had the memory of Elisha already faded, and was this the way to use the triumphs promised by the aged prophet on his deathbed?—those victories over the Syrian, which King Jehoash had seen so signally fulfilled?¹ Was this the way to requite the prophecy of Jonah the son of Amittai when he promised Jeroboam, in the early years of his reign, that the coasts of Israel should be restored?²

What the country needed was another prophet, a prophet of vision and courage who should drive a thrust straight at the heart of Israel's ingratitude and sin. Oh for another Elijah to beard the proud tyrant of Samaria and the hypocritical priests of the Golden Calves! Why did the Lord delay so long in choosing who should go for Him, whom He should send?

Thus, filled with the ferment of the times, dreamed Amos while still the young herdsman of Tekoa, and we may be sure he spoke of his visions often enough among his friends long before the great call came. It may well be that among the growing boys who looked up to the stalwart young dreamer as he strode off to his work among the hills were two of whom we shall hear a great deal more, young Isaiah and Micah, one day also to be

¹ 2 Kings 13¹⁴.

² 2 Kings 14²⁵. This Jonah was not the writer of the Old Testament *Book of Jonah*, though it is called by his name. See Chapter IX.

numbered among the dreamers and prophets of the Lord: while far away in Israel another youngster, Hosea, was studying the ways of his countrymen with a puzzled frown and trying in vain to reconcile them with the Will of God.

So for perhaps thirty or forty years Amos lived, as the preface to his Book informs us, *among the herdmen of Tekoa*,¹ pursuing outwardly the even tenor of his way, but inwardly burning with an ever increasing fire, upon which one significant phenomenon after another served to add fuel. Thus in 765 B.C. a dreadful plague devastated the whole of Eastern Asia from the Euphrates to the Great Sea of the Setting Sun, a visitation so momentous that it is even noted in the official Calendar or Limmu List of Nineveh, where we may read of it to this day. It was long remembered by Amos as a direct warning from Jehovah: *I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt, saith the Lord.*²

Eighteen months later came a portent still more terrifying, as though to drive home the unlearned lesson of the plague. As the shepherds were drowsily tending their sheep in the glare of the midday sun, suddenly the light seemed to pale a little, and looking upwards they saw with horror that the curved shadow of a great black hand was stealing over the face of the sun. Slowly but relentlessly the shadow crept on until at last every bit of the shining orb was blotted out: a darkness as of midnight fell on the land, the birds ceased their song, the flock huddled together in perplexity and fear. To Amos it seemed a foretaste of what the Last Day, the Day of the Lord, should be. As he

¹ 1¹.

² 4¹⁰.

himself expressed it, *Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?*¹ *It shall come to pass on that day, saith the Lord God, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day.*²

This total eclipse of the sun, so memorable for the prophet, is of the first importance for us in another way. So striking a phenomenon could not fail to be recorded in the Assyrian Calendar, where we may still read it inscribed on a tablet of clay, as clear as ever it was, among the notable events of King Ashurdan III. of Nineveh. And modern astronomers have been able to fix the precise date even more exactly. Total eclipses visible both in Nineveh and Palestine are not common, and the eclipse in question must have been that which calculation shows to have occurred in 763 B.C. So that we know almost to a year the date of the call of Amos, and from this fixed point a whole series of other dates have been ascertained.

No doubt this eclipse powerfully affected all thoughtful men who observed it, but to Amos it was the turning-point of his career. The wrath of the Lord had been written in the sky, and it was time some prophet should arise to warn the world of its impending doom. For it was the whole world and all the nations of the world who had fallen under that shadow; the finger of God had been pointed not at this nation only or at that, but all alike had fallen in the same condemnation.

Perhaps it was the all-embracing shadow of

¹ 5²⁰.

² 8⁹.

this eclipse which made Amos realize more forcibly than any previous prophet how limitless and universal was the power of Jehovah. Absurd to think of Him any longer merely as the God of the Hebrews! He was the God of all the gods and of all the nations of the whole earth.

THE CALL OF AMOS

THE conviction was borne upon Amos at last that he himself had been called to speak up for the Lord. Presumptuous though it might seem for a mere herdsman, so untrained, so completely without prophetic antecedents, the Voice became too insistent to be denied. *The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*¹ So he left his sheep and his sycamores and all that he had, exchanging his crook for the pilgrim's staff, his peasant's gown for the prophet's mantle. Henceforth Amos also was among the prophets.

The obvious inspiration and timeliness of his message very quickly secured for him full recognition by the regular prophetic schools. The report of his utterances and the heading prefixed to them in the collection we know as the "Book of Amos" bear all the marks of an early, perhaps contemporary, date. . . . *The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*² In a land of earthquakes it must have been a more than usually severe visitation to

¹ 3⁸.

² 1¹.

serve thus as a note of date, and indeed we find its repercussion within the prophecy itself—*Shall not the land tremble for this? . . . Yea, it shall rise up wholly like the River; and it shall be troubled and sink again, like the River of Egypt.*¹ But it would not have been remembered for very long afterwards, nor have served as a time-note save for contemporaries—as a matter of fact, we find it mentioned nowhere else.

Perhaps it was this earthquake which set the Divine seal upon the authority of Amos in the minds of his fellow-countrymen, driving home the lesson of his opening prophecies (chapters 1, 2) delivered two years earlier, wherein Amos, apparently still from the vantage point of Judah, sweeps the world with his eagle glance, and denounces the nations one by one.

Far away to the north he picks out Damascus, capital of once all-powerful Syria.² For all the proud palaces of Hazael and Ben-hadad they were living in a fool's paradise if they thought the dreaded Assyrian had gone for good. Soon he would return again more terrible than before, break down their walls, and carry them into captivity far away. *I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben-hadad.*³ This actually came to pass twenty years later when Tiglath-Pileser took Damascus in 734 B.C. Coming closer home,⁴ Amos then turned to the Philistines, Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and to Tyre of the Phœnicians, prophesying suffering and ruin which came to pass before the end of that generation at the hands of Sennacherib. And so he dealt in turn with Edom

1 88.

2 13.

3 14.

4 16.

who *did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity,*¹ with Ammon, and Moab, foreseeing in each case the doom which was soon to fall upon them, and by whose hand it should come.

In passing, however, we must recollect that although the prophets frequently foretold the future, and, especially when such forecasts were strikingly fulfilled, men remembered and repeated them, yet it was not the chief object of the prophets to "prophecy" things to come, in our modern sense of the term. To prophesy, in Biblical usage, means little more than to preach, to forth-tell rather than to foretell the Will of God. In later centuries, when all hope of transforming this present world had ebbed, the successors of the prophets did, it is true, concentrate on the far distant future, foretelling the happy days of a brave new world beyond. But the hearts of the earlier prophets were still filled with dreams of bringing about the Kingdom of God actually here on earth, and their forecasts were intended as warnings of what would inevitably happen, and that soon, if men failed to turn and repent in time.

As long as Amos confined himself to denouncing the foreign nations, we may be sure the people heard him gladly. But the prophet did not stop at that. Turning suddenly upon his own fellow-countrymen, he pointed at them, too, the finger of scorn. God was no respecter of persons or of peoples. Not only the foreigner, but his hearers, too, the Chosen People of Judah, have endangered their country *because they have re-*

*jected the law of the LORD, and have not kept His statutes,*¹ those very commandments which only quite recently the scribes of the prophets had published anew and put within the reach of all who ran to read. Because of the sins of Jerusalem, *I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, saith the LORD*²—a prophecy which was literally fulfilled a hundred and sixty years later (586 B.C.).

AMOS AT BETH-EL

BUT his chief concern after all was not with Judah, but with the northern kingdom of Israel. *Thus saith the LORD: For three transgressions of Israel, yea for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof.*³ Judah had suffered, and was still suffering, her king Uzziah a leper, her taxes heavy, her walls breached, her Temple despoiled. But Samaria was by now prouder, richer, more arrogant than ever. Not content with triumphing over her enemies, she had defiled herself with the abominations of idolatry, ground the poor and needy under her feet, indulged in the wildest excesses. *They have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes: that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor*—a graphic way of stigmatizing their greed for even the smallest plot of land—and *turn aside the way of the meek. All decency is forgotten; a man and his father will go unto the same maid, to profane my holy name.*⁴

To us it is a commonplace, but to the Jews of those far-off days it must have come as a startling

¹ 2⁴.

² 1⁵.

³ 2⁶.

⁴ 2⁶.

thought that a mere act of immorality could in itself "profane the name of God." That ritual irregularity or neglect might very well offend the Almighty, they could easily understand; the mysterious Being who had taken Israel under His protection naturally expected some return to be made in the shape of sacrifice and service. But only dimly were the more thoughtful among His people beginning to realize that God cared what sort of people they were. The sacrifice in itself was not enough; the hands that offered it must be clean. This marriage of morality with religion had been increasingly the ambition of every prophet, but Amos perceived, or at any rate expressed, the thought more clearly than any of his predecessors. He sees that practical goodness or "righteousness" is not merely a factor in human progress, nor even merely an arbitrary code of conduct imposed from above, but is something fundamental and organic, as it were, not only in the heart of man but in the mind of his Creator. Righteousness is a quality common both to God and man, and to depart from it is in itself a spiritual offence.

Of this truth God had never left Himself without witness, declares Amos, but the children of Israel, not content with turning a deaf ear to His voice, had deliberately tried to corrupt the seekers after truth, and to choke the voice of the preacher. *I raised up of your sons for prophets, and of your young men for Nazirites. . . . But ye gave the Nazirites wine to drink; and commanded the prophets, saying, Prophecy not.*¹ But now God had raised up another prophet, even himself,

Amos of Tekoa, and him no opposition should daunt, no man should silence. In one of his typical rustic similes he vows that in God's name he will ruthlessly denounce their sins. *Behold, I will press you in your place, as a cart presseth that is full of sheaves.*¹

Perhaps it was the earthquake which gave him confidence for the dangerous enterprise of beard-ing the mighty men of Samaria face to face. At any rate we now (chapters 3-8) find him no longer addressing them from the comparatively safe distance of Judah, but from the very centre of the adversaries' camp, claiming for himself the full rights of free speech which belonged of Divine permission to one who had been called to membership of the prophetic order. *Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets. The Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?*² Boldly now upon the mountains of Samaria, at the shrines of Beth-el and Dan, in the courtyards of the great houses where supercilious plutocrats lounged *in the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed,*³ the prophet denounced against them the wrath of God. *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria; . . . that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches . . . that sing idle songs to the sound of the viol . . . that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.*⁴

With stern contempt he bids them hear the prophets' warning: *Prepare to meet thy God,*

¹ 2¹³.² 3⁷.³ 3¹².⁴ 6^{1,4}.

O Israel.¹ An adversary there shall be, even round about the land: and he shall bring down thy strength from thee, and thy palaces shall be spoiled.² I will smite the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory shall perish, and the great houses shall have an end, saith the LORD.³

This terrible prophecy of the fall of Samaria was literally fulfilled about thirty years later, when Sargon took the city in 722 B.C. So complete was the destruction of the once mighty capital of Omri that only of recent years have excavations given the world any impression of its past glories, and a few broken pieces of ivory inlay turned up from the mounds are all that men have seen for over twenty-five centuries of the ivory palaces which once made the hearts of the kings of Israel glad.

Amos dwells long upon the insensate luxury of Israel. No doubt the strong contrast to the simplicity of impoverished Judah stirred all the puritan within him. But not for this alone would the Lord have punished the people. The transgressions of Israel, beneath the caparisons of this light-hearted exterior, were many and grave, sins both against man and God. He preaches with all the zeal of a social reformer against the oppression of the people by the capitalist class of the day. *Ye trample upon the poor, and take exactions from him of wheat. . . . Ye that afflict the just, that take a bribe, and that turn aside the needy in the gate from their right.⁴ . . . O ye that would swallow up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, . . . making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit.⁵*

¹ 4¹².² 3¹¹.³ 3¹⁶.⁴ 5¹¹.⁵ 8⁴.

St. James himself was not more practical in his faith.

Soon the Day of the Lord shall come, when the tables shall be turned upon the oppressor. *Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountains of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say unto their lords, Bring, and let us drink. The Lord GOD hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that they shall take you away with hooks, and your residue with fish hooks.*¹ The prophet is here evidently referring to the cruel practice of the Assyrians, so frequently portrayed upon the monuments, of piercing their victims' noses with iron hooks to which a rope was attached as they were led into captivity.

But what incensed the prophet most of all was the hypocrisy of Israel's leaders in pretending reverence for Jehovah while daily flouting His Will. It was not their custom of worshipping the Lord under the form of a golden calf that he denounced, nor was it the needless elaboration of their ceremonies. What aroused his wrath was the emptiness of it all, the soulless formalism and unreality of all this show of worship, which when it came to practical well-doing and moral righteousness meant simply nothing at all. *I hate, I despise your feasts, and I will take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. But let judgement roll*

*down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.*¹

So disturbing a personality as that of Amos could not long be overlooked even by the scornful aristocrats of Israel. This fanatical Judæan from over the border was actually becoming a menace to the prestige of the priest, and, unlettered though the erstwhile shepherd might be, there was an undeniable sting in his words, a rough force which beat like a hammer on even the hardest of hearts. Nor, to be fair, could one deny a certain beauty and rhythm in his mode of speech: his language was classically pure, his style far more polished and refined than one would have dreamed possible in a rustic. As Professor Robertson Smith observes in his *Prophets of Israel*, "To associate inferior culture with the simplicity and poverty of pastoral life is totally to mistake the conditions of Eastern society. At the courts of the Caliphs and their Emirs the rude Arabs of the desert were wont to appear without any feeling of awkwardness, and to surprise the courtiers by the finish of their impromptu verses and the fluent eloquence of their oratory." Amos was not, in short, a man to be dealt with by silent disdain: he must be firmly checked.

So Amaziah the priest of Beth-el determined to invoke the secular arm. *Then Amaziah the priest of Beth-el sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos hath conspired against thee in the midst of the house of Israel: the land is not able to bear all his words. And of course the story lost nothing in the telling: For thus Amos saith,*

*Jeroboam shall die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land.*¹

Jeroboam, however, was no Ahab. Secure in his ivory palace, he cared for none of these things, leaving the priests to manage their own affairs. So Amaziah marched up to Amos in the market-place, calling him, contemptuously, a "seer," a mere fanatical visionary, and bidding him go back where he belonged, where he could prophesy and pass the collecting bag among his own countrymen to his heart's desire. Only let him keep clear of Israel. Thus *Amaziah said unto Amos, O thou seer, go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Beth-el.*²

Then it was that Amos returned his famous answer, protesting that his presence in Beth-el was due to nothing less compelling than the command of Jehovah. Not as the emissary of any prophetic guild, not as an ordinary professional prophet, far less a "seer," did he come, but as one who had been called quite unexpectedly and in a unique way to utter the Lord's message in the ears of Israel. *I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet's son: but I was an herdman, and a dresser of sycomore trees: and the LORD took me from following the flock, and the LORD said unto me, Go, prophesy unto my people Israel.*³

Then, even as the words passed his lips, his eyes narrowed upon the arrogant priest, and a vivid picture of Amaziah's future destiny flashed across his mind. *Now therefore hear thou the words of the LORD: Thou sayest, Prophesy not against Israel, and drop not thy word against the house of Isaac; therefore*

¹ 7¹⁰.

² 7¹².

³ 7¹⁴.

*thus saith the LORD, Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and thy daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou thyself shall die in a land that is unclean.*¹

Nevertheless, if would be a mistake to conceive of the prophet either as vindictive or as a fatalist. His tone is stern, and perhaps more ruthless than that of his successors in prophecy, yet behind the fiercest denunciations of punishment in store is the constant assurance, tacit or otherwise, that the wrath of God can be assuaged and the punishment averted by timely repentance and amendment. *For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live.*² . . . *Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live; and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye say. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgement in the gate: it may be that the LORD, the God of hosts, will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph.*³

But the prophet-editor who compiled his works has left the most optimistic and gracious utterance to the very last, as was the manner of the prophetic schools who hated to have a Sacred Book end on a note of sadness. Here, in the last chapter of the very first of the writing prophets, we come upon an inspired forecast of the Day of the Lord very different from that Day of Wrath and Judgement which must, alas! precede it. At the latter end of all, the goodness of the Lord shall indeed be seen in the land of the living, for the Messiah Himself shall come to restore the Golden Age. *In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as*

¹ 7¹⁶.² 5⁴.³ 5¹⁴.

*in the days of old. . . . And the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel. . . . And I will plant them upon their land, saith the LORD thy God.*¹

On this joyful and triumphant note the Book of Amos the prophet comes to an end.

Of his last years we know nothing. Perhaps after all, though Jeroboam had refrained, the sword of his successor upon the throne of Israel, King Zechariah, may have cut short the prophet's unwelcome criticisms. For brief as was the reign of that unhappy monarch—a mere six months—we are told that “he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as his fathers had done.”²

But though the voice of Amos may have been prematurely stilled, not so the voice of prophecy. Stirred to emulation, it may be, by the preaching of the older prophet from Tekoa, one of Israel's own sons now took up the thread: for Amos had scarcely shaken the dust of Beth-el from his feet when Hosea heard and obeyed the call to denounce his country's grievous sins. Amos, in fact, had forged the original link in a chain of Writing Prophets which was to stretch without serious interruption from the eighth century before Christ to the threshold of the first.

¹ 9 11, 13.

² 2 Kings 15⁹.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

AMOS

B.C.	JUDAH.	ISRAEL.
805.	? Birth of Amos (JOASH king).	Adad - nirari attacks Syria, relieving pres- sure on Israel.
804.		Jehoash.
799.		Death of Elisha.
798.		Jehoash defeats Syria.
795.	AMAZIAH.	
788.		JEROBOAM II. Prosperity of Israel.
786.	AZARIAH, UZZIAH.	
780.	? Birth of Hosea, Micah, Isaiah.	
773.		Shalmanezzer IV. at- tacks Damascus.
765.	The Great Plague.	
763.	Total eclipse of sun, June 15.	
754.	Call of Amos (<i>Amos</i> I, 2).	
752.	"The Earthquake."	
751.		Amos at Beth-el (<i>Amos</i> 3-7).
750.	Amos back in Judah (<i>Amos</i> 8, 9).	Call of Hosea.
747.	? Death of Amos.	ZECHARIAH.

CHAPTER II

HOSEA

HOSEA, a younger contemporary of Amos, was probably born early in the reign of Jeroboam II., King of Israel, perhaps in the very year that the unhappy Azariah (or Uzziah, as the prophets called him) came to the throne of Judah (786 B.C.).

But the circumstances of Hosea's birth and upbringing were very different from those of the older prophet. Amos was a native of Judah: Hosea of Israel. An exceptional interest, in fact, attaches to his work in that he is the only native of the northern kingdom whose written prophecies have come down to us. Again, Amos started life as a humble herdsman in a land impoverished by years of dearth, disease, and spoliation. What galled him most in his surroundings was the contrast between the reckless extravagance of the upper classes and the misery of the downtrodden working man. Hosea was evidently of better family and reared in far easier circumstances. It is significant that, more fortunate than Amos, he "has a father": he is *Hosea, the son of Beeri*.¹

Moreover, Hosea was brought up in Israel during the most prosperous thirty years which that kingdom had ever known. Jeroboam II. had followed up with much vigour the three victories which his predecessor Joash had been

¹ I¹.

promised by Elisha. After flicking aside the troublesome Moabites on his flank, he had so intimidated the once all-powerful Syrian on the north that his borders at one time extended even to distant Hamath, as Jonah the prophet the son of Amittai had foretold.¹

The name of "Jonah, the son of Amittai" will strike a familiar chord, for he it was who, according to the *Book of Jonah*, was cast overboard on a voyage from Joppa to Spain, spent three days in the belly of a big fish, and afterwards preached the word of the Lord in Nineveh. But the so-called *Book of Jonah* has no historical connection with the eighth-century prophet of whom we are now speaking. It was written at least four centuries later, and why it should be attributed by its author to Jonah the son of Amittai no one knows, unless indeed it was because that prophet was the first to become aware of Nineveh as a rising star in the east, and that he is mentioned in connection with the sea—the sea of the Arabah.² All we know of the historical Jonah is that he was an older contemporary of Hosea, and that he prophesied the triumph of Jeroboam II. over the neighbouring kingdom of Syria.

Syria, indeed, was now in a state of rapid decline, harassed by Israel on the south, and still more dangerously by Assyria on the east. In 773 B.C., and again in the following year, the cuneiform inscriptions tell us that Shalmanezer IV. attacked Damascus and Hadrach. Possibly it was during these raids that he made that savage onslaught upon the little Syrian town of Beth-arbel, which Hosea recalls long afterwards: *All*

¹ 2 Kings 14²⁵.

² *Ibid.*

*thy fortresses shall be spoiled, as Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle: the mother was dashed in pieces with her children.*¹ In 765 B.C. Shalmanezzer's successor on the throne of Nineveh (Ashurdan III.) continued the assault. To Samaria the consequences of Syria's decline were an increasing tide of prosperity, and on the crest of this wave Hosea was brought up a citizen of no mean city.

It is noticeable, therefore, that the social iniquities and inequalities of Israel did not strike him with the same force as they struck Amos. In passing, he supports, indeed, the older prophet in his condemnation of social injustice, rapacity, and offences against the moral code. *There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery; they break out, and blood toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn.*² Like Amos, he speaks of the "balances of deceit"³: *Israel is a trafficker, the balances of deceit are in his hand: he loveth to oppress. And Ephraim said, Surely I am become rich, I have found me wealth.*⁴ But it is evident that his interest in these things is only secondary. It was not offence against man but against God which roused him most.

Reading in fact between the lines of his prophecy, one would gather that, unlike Amos, Hosea had been from the first connected with the recognized prophetic schools of Israel, and brought up in the characteristic prophetic atmosphere. Perhaps he had always intended to become a prophet. At any rate, his attitude to the regular members of that profession is conspicu-

¹ IO 4.² 4².³ Amos 8³.⁴ 12⁷.

ously indulgent, while he uniformly shares their characteristic reaction towards priestcraft and all its works. He admits, it is true, that the prophets have remained strangely silent in face of the enormities going on all around them. At times they have seemed almost as much in the dark as the people themselves, and have been unduly tender of the reputation of the priests. *Let no man strive, neither let any man reprove; for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. And thou shalt stumble in the day, and the prophet also shall stumble with thee in the night.*¹ There are also many false prophets, men who are either self-deceived or have betrayed true prophecy for gain. *The prophet is a fool, the man that hath the spirit is mad . . . as for the prophet, a fowler's snare is in all his ways, and enmity in the house of his God. They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah.*²

Yet the genuine prophet *hath* the spirit. He has saved Israel before, and he will save Israel again when the time shall come. *By a prophet the LORD brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet was he preserved.*³ Hosea thus claims Moses as a forerunner of the prophets, and can give him no more honourable title. From Moses his thoughts move on to Elijah, Elisha, and the rest: *Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.*⁴ . . . *I have also spoken unto the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets have I used similitudes.*⁵ No doubt Hosea even as a young man felt that the gift of prophecy was latent in him, and that one day he himself

¹ 4¹.² 9⁷.³ 12¹³.⁴ 6⁵.⁵ 12¹⁰.

would employ one of those "similitudes" on his own account. The use of such symbolic actions as object lessons to drive home the prophet's message was a well-understood practice of the guilds. Every Israelite had heard of Ahijah's rending his garment into twelve pieces to signify the partition of the kingdom, and of many similar gestures which even the later prophets did not disdain. But Hosea's similitude was the most striking, even terrible, of them all, as we shall see.

Among the prophets so venerated by Hosea we may certainly number one who was even then living, the aged Amos. It is almost impossible that the young enthusiast of Israel should not have met and heard the stirring utterances of the prophet who came from Judah and so boldly bearded Jeroboam and his priests in the very mountains of Samaria itself. News of the stern and eloquent "seer," as Amaziah had dubbed him, would spread like wild-fire in that little kingdom of Israel scarcely bigger than Yorkshire. Men would flock to see him in person, especially those (and we may be sure there were many) who were discontented with their hard lot or horror-struck by the state of their country's religion. Amongst the latter we may well number Hosea.

Moreover, there are many echoes, we might almost say quotations, of the Judæan prophet found in the *Book of Hosea*, as though all his life the words of the Master had been ringing in his ears. *I hate, I despise your feasts, . . . yea, though ye offer me your burnt offerings, I will not accept them,* said Amos.¹ *I desire mercy, and not sacrifice ; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings,*

¹ Amos 5²¹.

repeats Hosea.¹ *The lion hath roared, who will not fear?*² in Amos, becomes *the LORD, who shall roar like a lion*³ in Hosea. The repeated allusion to the *balances of deceit* has already been noticed: and so on. The parallels are numerous, and it is an exceedingly interesting task to set them side by side. Yet the prophecies of Amos can scarcely have been circulated in writing by the time Hosea had received his call. The young man may well have heard Amos himself, perhaps in the very market-place of Beth-el with which he was so familiar.

But the point in the older prophet's discourse which struck Hosea most was the denunciation of those elaborate and impressive sacrifices at the altars of Beth-el with which he had been so familiar from his youth up. "*I hate, I despise your feasts*"—the strange words of Amos hammered on his brain. Of what worth were the most punctilious sacrifices, the richest temple ornaments, the most splendid ceremonial and pomp, if all the time they were but specious cloaks for hypocrisy and unrighteousness? But their sacrifices are hollow shams! *They have not cried unto me with their heart. . . . They return, but not to him that is on high; they are like a deceitful bow.*⁴ *Their doings will not suffer them to turn unto their God: for the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.*⁵ Surely such sacrifices are vain.

But Hosea went further than Amos. Neither the prophet of Tekoa nor Elijah and Elisha before him had questioned the right of the Israelites to

¹ 6⁶ (Matt. 9¹³, 12⁷).
³ 11¹⁰.

⁴ 7¹⁴.

² Amos 3⁸.

⁶ 5⁴.

worship the Lord in their own way, under the traditional form of the Golden Calves which King Jeroboam I., the son of Nebat, had set up at the founding of the northern kingdom. The calves or bulls had been well-understood symbols of Divine strength, and regarded perhaps as harmless if approached in the right spirit. The younger prophet, on the other hand, sees the Golden Calves as intrinsically and in themselves a danger to the purity of worship. To him they savoured of idolatry, of the image-worship which had so defiled the land in Canaanite days. Essentially, in fact, such images even of pure gold were against the Commandments of the Lord as given to the greatest of all the prophets when he led the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. The story of how Moses had denounced and destroyed a similar golden calf made by Aaron at the foot of Sinai¹ had been long overlooked, but could now be seen in black and white in the "Elohistic" narrative of Exodus, which Hosea in all probability possessed. *Ephraim is joined to idols,*² discovers the prophet with a startled cry; *of their silver and their gold have they made them idols, that they may be cut off.*³ . . . *And now they sin more and more, and have made them molten images of their silver. . . . They say of them, Let the men that sacrifice kiss the calves.*⁴ The Golden Calves of Beth-el and Dan were no exception to the law against images. God will have none of them. *He hath cast off thy calf, O Samaria; mine anger is kindled against them: how long will it be ere they attain to innocency? For from Israel is even this; the workman made it, and it is no God; yea, the calf of*

¹ Exodus 32.² 4¹⁷.³ 8⁴.⁴ 13².

*Samaria shall be broken in pieces. For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.*¹ Not Ten Commandments but ten thousand are against it : *Though I write for him my law in ten thousand precepts, they are counted as a strange thing. . . . For Israel hath forgotten his Maker.*

But Hosea, greatly in advance of his time, goes even further than this. There are hints in his prophecy that already he is beginning to distrust that senseless multiplicity of altars and sacrificial shrines which did more than anything else to corrupt the purity of worship, and which was ultimately checked by the Deuteronomic reforms of Josiah. *Ephraim hath multiplied altars to sin, altars have been unto him to sin.*³ . . . *According to the multitude of his fruit he hath multiplied his altars ; according to the goodness of his land they have made goodly pillars. Their heart is divided ; now shall they be found guilty : he shall smite their altars, he shall spoil their pillars.*⁴

The tendency which led the prophets of a later generation to concentrate all sacrifice at one central altar is already manifest. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face*⁵ is a phrase that reminds us of the Deuteronomic "the place which the Lord thy God shall choose,"⁶ referring to the central sanctuary. More than any other prophet Hosea was the inspiration of Hilkiah's "Book of the Law."

So Hosea in the authentic spirit of the prophet well in advance of his times inveighs against

¹ 86.² 812.³ 811.⁴ 101.⁵ 515.⁶ Deuteronomy 12.

idolatry, against the multitude of altars, and against all that corrupts the pure worship of the loving Lord.

How much of the law against images, which did not become generally known or observed until the days of Josiah a century later, was already traditional in the northern kingdom cannot be said with certainty. That Hosea was at any rate strongly impregnated with the spirit which made *Deuteronomy* what it is can be seen very clearly all through his Book. There is even a curious correspondence in detail, such as in his reference to the Deuteronomic Feast of Tabernacles, and the mention of Admah and Zeboim,¹ where Amos, quoting the Jehovistic narrative, would have said "Sodom and Gomorrah."²

The *Book of Hosea* is far fuller than that of the Tekoan shepherd in its allusions to the Scriptures, as was perhaps to be expected. He has quotations from nearly every book of the "Law and the Former Prophets," from the reference to *Genesis* in *they like Adam have transgressed the covenant* to the *sin of Gibeah* written in the *Book of Judges*, and the *blood of Jezreel*³ narrated in the *Second Book of Kings*. Nor, it would seem, is his knowledge of the Scriptures confined to the northern Elohist narrative: he is aware, quite clearly, of certain episodes such as the birth of Jacob and Esau, and the wrestling of Jacob with God, which are usually attributed to the southern or Jehovistic document. There is much of supreme interest to the Biblical critic in the study of Hosea's scriptural references. Could it be that in some way the connection between Amos and Hosea was responsible for

¹ 11⁸.² Amos 4¹¹.³ 6⁷.

that mutual respect of north for south which ultimately led to the Scriptures of each being joined as the Bible of both?

THE MARRIAGE OF HOSEA

WE left the young prophet listening to Amos in the market-place at Beth-el, moved to strange stirrings of spirit. We may go further. It would be no very wild conjecture to suggest that the preaching of Amos was the decisive factor which launched Hosea on the world no longer as a mere dreamer, but a prophet indeed. We can picture him gazing up earnestly at the Elijah-like shepherd of Tekoa, as he tore the last shreds of self-complacency from the hearts of his audience, convincing them of sin against the Lord. *The virgin of Israel is fallen, cried Amos; she shall no more rise: there is none to raise her up.*¹ Perhaps, as he heard these words, the eyes of Hosea fell upon some poor drab of a fallen woman near him in the crowd, as false to her womanhood as Israel had been to her God, and as utterly divorced from hope of being raised up.

And yet, his thoughts ran on, Jehovah is not as men are. Surely the merciful Lord cannot for ever cast off the people whom He had chosen and for whom He had done so much! *When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt.*² So Hosea, in words familiar to us from their Gospel association, recalls the glories of Israel's past, of the deliverance from the oppression of Egypt, of the days when Jacob *had power with God: yea, he had power over the angel, and pre-*

¹ Amos 5².

² II¹ (Matt. 2¹⁵).

veiled,¹ of his vision of the heavenly ladder, when God promised He would never leave him . . . promised it on this actual spot, this very Beth-el against whose ancient altar the Judæan prophet was denouncing the divine wrath. Surely it was incredible that the loving Lord should forget such love as that. Israel may indeed be like that fallen woman, but—suddenly it came to Hosea in a flash, the indisputable call: if he, a mere man, could forgive that wretched drab her monstrous sins, if he could challenge the words of Amos and prove that after all there *is* one that will raise her up, why then would not God do the like and more for the fallen Virgin of Israel?

The idea crystallized. It would be the most wonderful, the most moving “similitude” that ever prophet had wrought. The Voice came clear and not to be denied: *Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredom and children of whoredom: for the land doth commit great whoredom, departing from the LORD.*² So young Hosea took the notorious creature *Gomer the daughter of Diblaim*³ to be his wife.

And in due course she bore him a son. The Lord who had commanded the marriage had overruled this also: the birth of the children was mystically part of the great similitude. *Jezreel* was the name Hosea gave to his first-born in memory of the bloody massacre in that city which Jehu, in the Name of the Lord forsooth, had made of the house of Ahab, and in forecast of a like punishment to fall upon King Jeroboam and his heir-apparent, last offspring of the house of Jehu. *I will avenge the blood of Jezreel upon the house of Jehu, and I will cause the kingdom of the house of*

¹ 12³.² 1².³ 1³.

*Israel to cease.*¹ A notable advance here in the prophetic understanding of the mind of God. There had been a time when Jehu was commended by the men of God for his bloody massacre of the idolaters, but now Hosea perceives that in the eyes of the God of Love no sin can justify men in treating each other so.

The prophecy of Hosea was soon fulfilled. Within three years Jeroboam II. was a dead man, and his son Zechariah, last of the house of Jehu, had perished under the dagger of an assassin.

In the meantime Gomer had borne a second child, this time a daughter. *Lo-ruhamah*, No-Mercy, her father called her, for the Lord said unto him, *I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel.*²

By this time Amos had returned to his native land, leaving behind him ineffaceable memories, and causing Hosea to look wistfully across the border to the southern kingdom which was so fortunate in her men of God. Over and over again he contrasts the splendid loyalty of Judah, or perhaps rather his distance-enchanted ideal of it, with the gross whoredom of the north. No mercy for Israel, saith the Lord, *but I will have mercy upon the house of Judah, and will save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, nor by sword, nor by battle, by horses, nor by horsemen.*³ What he meant was that God would save Judah by His word alone, by the spiritual weapons of prophecy, by such men as Amos and a newcomer amongst the prophets of whom there were already rumours afloat by name Isaiah.

In after years the prophet-scribes of Judah who

¹ I⁴.

² I⁶.

³ I⁷.

edited Hosea's works understood this passage as a reference to the mysterious retreat of Sennacherib from before the defenceless walls of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (701 B.C.), and in view of this they headed the *Book of Hosea* with the statement that his prophetic ministry extended to those days. Hosea, however, ceased to prophesy some ten years or more before King Hezekiah came to the throne of David. There is no reference in his work, for instance, to the Syro-Ephraimite alliance of 735 B.C. Yet who shall deny that the prophet, even fifty years earlier than the siege of Jerusalem, may not have discerned in Judah that spiritual strength which of its own innate power prevails even against swords and staves?

At all events he looked on Judah as being all that Israel was not. *Ephraim compasseth me about with falsehood, and the house of Israel with deceit: but Judah yet ruleth with God, and is faithful with the Holy One.*¹ Judah was indeed in better spiritual case than her neighbour. By this time the presumption of King Uzziah in competing with the priests had been signally punished (if we are to accept the tradition preserved in the *Book of Chronicles*²) by the stroke of leprosy which confined him to his rooms, and his son Jotham as regent was doing all that he could to restore the pure worship of Jehovah. On his accession to the crown in 744 B.C., he immediately repaired the somewhat neglected Temple, and for the rest of his life "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord."³ Since the year of Jotham's accession was also the year of Isaiah's call to the prophetic ministry, Hosea might well look on Judah as the

¹ II¹².² 2 Chronicles 26¹⁶.³ 2 Kings 15³⁵.

home of righteousness. *Though thou, Israel, play the harlot, yet let not Judah offend. . . .*¹

It was a sad day for Hosea, we may be sure, as it must have been for Isaiah, when good King Jotham died, to be succeeded in 741 B.C. by a ruler of very different character, Ahaz. His name, as the Assyrian inscriptions show us, was really Jeho-Ahaz, but so great were his sins that the Hebrew historians with one accord refuse to allow him the divine prefix. Then Hosea had to admit that Israel was not alone in her sin: *Judah also shall stumble with them.*² . . . *The princes of Judah are like them that remove the landmark: I will pour out my wrath upon them like water.*³ But as the Lord would have mercy upon Israel, so He would not withhold it from her sister kingdom: *O Judah, there is an harvest appointed for thee, when I bring again the captivity of my people.*⁴

The "captivity" here spoken of by Hosea is, as so often in the earlier prophets, the metaphorical captivity of sin. It is unnecessary, though not impossible, to attribute to Hosea an anticipation of that literal captivity by the waters of Babylon to which the Jews were exiled many years later.

But we have gone too fast, and must now return to Israel, with whom Hosea had paramount concern. It was probably about the year of Jeroboam's death, and the accession of his son Zechariah in 747 B.C., that Gomer's third child, another son, was born. The prophet's outlook is now more gloomy than ever. *Lo-Ammi*, No-People-of-Mine, he called the child, for it seemed

¹ 4¹⁵.

² 5⁵.

³ 5¹⁰.

⁴ 6¹¹.

as though for the time being the Lord had entirely disowned His children: . . . *ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.*¹

As if to lend point to this cry of despair, Gomer now committed the supreme sin of unfaithfulness. Grown weary of well-doing, tired of her life with Hosea as a respectable wife and mother, she began to yearn for the more highly coloured round of perpetual excitement and sensation from which he had rescued her five years earlier. Just as Israel had so often been guilty of base ingratitude to her Lord, sighing for the flesh-pots of Egypt, and running once more after the Baals of fleshly lust, so Gomer one night brought forth her old trinkets from their hiding-place, packed up her personal belongings, and left her husband and her home. *For she said, I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.*² . . . *She decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and went after her lovers, and forgot me.*³

Hosea was beside himself with grief and indignation. This was too much. He was a man as well as a prophet. All that God had been to Israel, Hosea had tried to be to that woman. *I took them on my arms. . . . I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love; I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat before them.*⁴ He had done all he could for Gomer, yet she had betrayed him after all, making him a laughing-stock among his neighbours. No man could go on with it after that. He looked bitterly upon the baby she had left behind. Lo-Ammi, No-People-of-Mine! Nor should Gomer

¹ I 9.² 2 5.³ 2 13.⁴ II 3.

any more be wife of his: . . . *she is not my wife, neither am I her husband.*¹ In the heat of his rage, his eyes fell upon the other children too. Rebellious children they would grow up to be, with such a mother's blood in their veins. He would send them after her, disown them, cast them out. *Yea, upon her children will I have no mercy; for they be children of whoredom. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully.*² He would make the woman sorry for this: she should have no second chance. Sooner or later she would be discarded by those lovers of hers, and she would come creeping back to him. *She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now.*³ But she should find the door shut in her face.

And yet . . . and yet. For all her sins, so would not God do to Israel. Was not this final treachery of Gomer but part and parcel of the similitude of Hosea's whole married life: did it not all exactly fit in, even as God had said when He bade him take the woman for his wife? And would not the similitude break down just at the crucial point, if the prophet failed now to show forth the almost unbelievable mercy of God through the sacramental object-lesson of his own power to forgive? What would God say, what had He not said over and over again in like circumstances? *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? . . . mine heart is turned within me, my compassions are kindled together. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger, I will not return*

¹ 2².² 2⁴.³ 2⁷.

*to destroy Ephraim : for I am God, and not man ; the Holy One in the midst of thee.*¹

Little by little, in the midst of his bitterness, the prophet realized that in this matter he stood for God himself. His mood changed. His threats against Gomer begin to falter and tail away into sorrowful regrets. The gentle dew from heaven drops into his heart, hope lifts up her head, misery is exchanged for mercy. *I will give her . . . the valley of Achor for a door of hope.*² One day, like Israel, she would return unto her lord, and like the Lord he would say to her, *Thou shalt call me Ishi*³ ("my husband"); and I will make thee forget thy former sins. *And I will betroth thee unto me for ever. . . . I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness. . . . And I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy.*⁴

How long this change of heart delayed in coming we do not know. Nor can we be sure whether or no in the first flush of his anger Hosea had actually divorced his wife. But at all events some time must have elapsed before Hosea bowed to the commandment of the Lord to go forth and seek her out from the hovels of sin.

At length the morning came when the prophet could hesitate no longer. *The LORD said unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend and an adulteress, even as the LORD loveth the children of Israel, though they turn unto other gods.*⁵ So Hosea set forth, easily tracing his more than ever notorious wife to the tenement where she was living with her latest paramour. And here yet a further humiliation awaited him. The man refused to give her up. She had become useful to

¹ 11 8.² 2 15.³ 2 16.⁴ 2 19.⁵ 3 1.

him, and Hosea had long since lost all rights in her. There was only one thing for it, Hosea would have to buy back his own wife at the standard price of a foreign slave—that ill-omened sum of money which the Jews never named without a sneer, namely “thirty pieces of silver.” So for the equivalent of this, as the prophet himself tells us, *I bought her to me for fifteen pieces of silver, and an homer of barley.* And he brought her to his own home.¹

But not at first to full conjugal restitution. God Himself would not allow the past to be as though it had never been: there must be an interval of penitence and amendment before Gomer could be restored to her place in her husband's affections, or before even repentant Israel could be wholly raised up by the Lord. *Thou shalt abide for me many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be any man's wife: so will I also be toward thee,*² said Hosea. *For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice . . . and afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; and shall come with fear unto the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.*³

Thus, twenty-five years before the event which he saw so clearly coming, Hosea foretold the collapse of the northern kingdom with the capture of Samaria by Sargon in 722 B.C. For nearly two hundred years (722-536 B.C.) the Israelites were in exile in Babylonia, without a king or a prince or the possibility of offering legitimate sacrifice to Jehovah. During that period the

¹ 3².² 3³.³ 3⁴.

name "Israel" ceased to bear its narrower significance as referring only to the northern kingdom, and when the exiles were joined after the fall of Jerusalem by a further multitude of exiles from Judah, the whole of the Jews thus united were known as the Children of Israel. This usage, though it causes a little confusion at times, is still observed—thus the "Prophets of Israel," or the "History of Israel," refers to the kingdoms both of Samaria and of Jerusalem.

Of what the commentators primly called Hosea's "domestic circumstances" we hear no more. How that ill-assorted union worked out in practice, and how Gomer requited her husband's second offer of his heart and home, we cannot say. But one fears, from the purely human point of view, the worst. And if the relations of Hosea with his wife continued, as they had begun, to march pace for pace with those of Israel and her Lord, then the shadow over the prophet's home was black indeed.

The impression made by Hosea's tragic "similitude" was immense. It made prophecy out of a "human document," and his analogy of the relation of God and Israel with the union of man and wife remained for ever afterwards the standard mode of expression among the prophets. Even to-day we still speak of Holy Matrimony as "Signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church."

THE DECLINE OF SAMARIA

THE accession of Zechariah to the throne of Israel had not only brought to an end the long period of power and prosperity which the northern

kingdom had enjoyed under the rule of his father, but had marked a definite stage in its spiritual and moral decline. Zechariah himself reigned only for a short six months, but his assassination at the hands of the treacherous Shallum, son of Jabesh, though it brought the idolatrous and blood-stained house of Jehu to an end, by no means ended the shedding of blood. Shallum himself was slain after a few weeks by a more capable adventurer, Menahem son of Gadi, who had made Tirzah, the ancient capital of the kingdom, his headquarters, and now made a sudden onslaught on Samaria itself. Then indeed were the words of Hosea fulfilled : *There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery ; they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*¹ Three kings had died within as many years, and now the fourth king, Menahem, launches his evil reign in a baptism of blood. One of his first acts was the massacre of the people of Tirzah and Tiphsah in Gilead, sparing neither women nor children because they would not at once acknowledge the usurper's title to the throne. *O house of the king, . . . ye have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor. And the revoltors are gone deep in making slaughter.*²

But the pride of Israel was soon to have a fall, as Amos and Hosea had foreseen. In 745 B.C. a soldier of outstanding military genius, by the name of Pulu, or Pul, had made himself master of Assyria, and now reigned with the title of Tiglath-Pileser IV. After settling affairs in Nineveh the warrior-king turned greedy eyes upon the glittering and still unravished Eldorado of Palestine as a

¹ 4².

² 5¹.

stepping-stone towards the treasures of the Nile. At length in 738 B.C. he marched westward upon the Syrians and their allies. The inscriptions in which he tells us of his triumph still survive.

They are interesting inscriptions, because they add considerably to our knowledge of the political situation of Israel and Syria at this time. It would seem that the Assyrian menace had at last compelled the Syrian principalities to attempt some sort of military combination against the common foe. The leader of the confederacy was a certain King Azariau, of the small North Syrian state of Jaudi, once mistakenly identified with Azariah, King of Judah. Tiglath-Pileser records how "he burnt with fire the cities which had gone over to Azariau, King of Jaudi, and smashed them like pots," carrying off into exile 30,300 of their people. This is the first time we hear of those wholesale transportations of conquered peoples which became so characteristic of the Assyrians and their successors in Babylon.

Amongst those who resisted the blandishments of this Azariau and avoided destruction by a prompt submission and payment of tribute were Rezin, King of Damascus, and Menahem, King of Samaria, as we are told both in the inscriptions and in the *Book of Kings*. The name of *Minihimmu of Samirinaï* amongst the list of tributaries in the Assyrian records of 738 B.C. is readily identifiable; while the Biblical narrative informs us that *Mena-hem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand.*¹ Possibly the latter phrase implies

¹ 2 Kings 15¹⁹.

Assyrian support for Israel as against the encroachments of Damascus.

There is no other evidence concerning the reign of Menahem except what we can deduce from the contemporary writings of Hosea the prophet. From these we see clearly enough that Menahem was at first in two minds which way to turn for help in his hour of need, whether to Assyria or to Egypt. Against the former the prophet warned him in no uncertain terms, as we see from what is evidently his comment on the incident mentioned above: *When Ephraim saw his sickness, . . . then went Ephraim to Assyria, and sent to king Jareb (that is, to the "Man of Strife"): but he is not able to heal you, neither shall he cure you of your wound.¹ . . . Asshur shall not save us.²* No amount of tribute-money, or danegeld, will suffice to save them from destruction. *They are gone up to Assyria, like a wild ass alone by himself: Ephraim hath hired lovers. Yea, though they hire among the nations, now will I gather them; and they begin to be minished by reason of the burden of the king of princes.³* The ruthless and rapacious king of Assyria, whose god bore an eagle on his shield, would surely swoop upon his prey: *As an eagle he cometh against the house of the LORD.⁴* (A striking simile this: no wonder that in after years men saw in it a prophecy of the descent of the Roman eagles upon Jerusalem!) *Israel hath cast off that which is good: the enemy shall pursue him. They have set up kings, but not by me; they have made princes, and I knew it not.⁵* There is no hope in the diplomacy which would conciliate Assyria.

Nor was there any hope in an alliance with

¹ 5¹³.

² 14³.

³ 8⁹.

⁴ 8¹.

⁵ 8³.

Egypt, or in Menahem's half-hearted attempts to play off the one against the other. *Ephraim is like a silly dove, without understanding: they call unto Egypt, they go to Assyria.*¹ It is an empty device: *Ephraim feedeth on wind . . . they make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into Egypt.*² The Pharaoh, it is true, would have been only too glad to use Israel as a stick with which to beat his hereditary enemy in Nineveh, but he was in no position at this time to engage such a foe as Tiglath-Pileser. The King of Egypt in fact (his name was Piankhi, of the chaotic Twenty-third Dynasty) was fully occupied in keeping his own house in order, with a score of petty kinglets yapping at his heels. The woes of Israel would find but little sympathy there: *this shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.*³

Menahem, however, staved off the inevitable during his lifetime. After a reign of ten years, he died in 737 B.C., and once more his unhappy country was stained with blood. His son Pekahiah had not long ascended the ill-omened throne of Samaria before he was slain by his own chief general, Pekah the son of Remaliah, of whom we hear so much in the prophecies of Isaiah. In these troubles the prophet Hosea sees only too clearly the near approach of the destined end. *Where now is thy king, that he may save thee in all thy cities?*⁴ he cries, as he thinks of the six godless and impotent monarchs which have come and gone within the last twelve years, each more incapable than the last. *Thou saidst, Give me a king and princes. I have given thee a king in mine anger, and have taken him away in my wrath.*⁵ . . . On the

¹ 7¹¹.² 12¹.³ 7¹⁶.⁴ 13¹⁰.⁵ 13¹¹.

day of our king the princes made themselves sick with the heat of wine ; he stretched out his hand with scorers.¹ . . . All their kings are fallen : there is none among them that calleth unto me.² Even the people, blind and heedless though they be, have lost confidence in such so-called kings. Surely now they shall say, We have no king : for we fear not the LORD ; and the king, what can he do for us ?³

Little enough her kings could do for Israel at this stage, turn which way they would. As the storm gathers one can see them in the pages of Hosea growing at last seriously alarmed, trusting in despair now to Assyria's susceptibility to bribes, now to the fair promises of succour from Egypt.

It seems clear from the absence of any hint in Hosea that so far the policy of a Pan-Palestinian alliance under Rezin the King of Damascus had not yet been mooted as a third choice. Yet the prophet lived long enough to see the scales come down heavily in favour of defiance of Assyria. Doubtful at first whether Israel's punishment should befall at the hands of Pharaoh or of Tiglath-Pileser, he ends by seeing quite clearly that it is the latter who is destined to avenge the Lord. *He (Israel) shall not return into the land of Egypt ; but the Assyrian shall be his king.⁴ . . . It also (the Golden Calf of Beth-el) shall be carried unto Assyria for a present to king Jareb.⁵*

In 735 B.C. Pekah the son of Remaliah, captain of the Israelite forces, murdered his royal master Pekahiah and made himself king. At once he threw in his lot with the anti-Assyrian party in Samaria, openly flinging down the gauntlet of defiance to Tiglath-Pileser. It was a gambler's

¹ 7⁵.² 7⁷.³ 10³.⁴ 11⁵.⁵ 10⁶.

throw. No force of character lay behind it, still less a desire to return and trust in the Lord. A mad king and a bad king from every point of view was Pekah, who *made Israel to sin*, and it may well be that amongst those who opposed his policy the first to fall a victim to his sword was the intransigent Hosea. At any rate there is nothing in his prophecies, as we have already observed, to show that he lived beyond the year of Pekah's accession.¹

So passed the only prophet of the northern kingdom whose written words have come down to us. But again, as the torch that fell from the hand of Amos was at once passed on to Hosea, so now it passes on to one far greater than either of them; and in the vivid pages of the First Isaiah we shall read how Pekah struggled for a brief two years to escape his destiny, how his ally Rezin perished miserably in the ruins of Damascus, and how with the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. the terrible forebodings of Hosea were only too completely fulfilled.

Yet Hosea, like his predecessor, ends on a note of triumph and hope renewed. Some day, after the Justice of God had been satisfied by exacting retribution for Israel's sins, the Love of God shall restore her, even as Gomer was ultimately restored, to full deliverance and everlasting joy. *Come, and let us return unto the LORD; for he hath torn, and he will heal us: he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*² Nor is the time far distant merely "a day or two" indeed from the viewpoint of Him with Whom a thousand years are but as yesterday: *After two days will he revive us:*

¹ Page 43 above.

² 6¹.

*on the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live before him.*¹ Can anything be clearer than the mystical interpretation of this passage? In words which promised the speedy restoration of Israel, the prophet foretold more than he, perhaps, foresaw—the Resurrection of the Messiah in Whom all Israel is summed up.

Again through Hosea comes the voice of the Lord: *I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, where are thy plagues? O grave, where is thy destruction?*² Thus the beautiful words so familiar to us in the Burial Service were first uttered by the prophet Hosea to express his confidence in the victory of Israel over sin and desolation. As so often, the prophet prophesied more than he knew.

Finally, to close Hosea's prophecy, the organ swells to its most joyous mood, the glad chords crash, the diapason ends on a triumphant harmony of God and man. *I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and blossom as the vine. . . . Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have answered, and will regard him.*³

So we close the little Book of the prophet Hosea, wishing that more of his words had been preserved, and that we knew more of the man who wrote them. He is called a "minor" prophet.

¹ 6².² 13¹⁴ (1 Cor. 15⁵⁵).³ 14⁴.

one of the twelve so named by the Jewish compilers of the Old Testament; but the adjective refers only to the length of their reported utterances. Hosea in truth was one of the greatest of the prophets of Israel. Others had spoken of the Justice, the Righteousness, and the Majesty of God: it was Hosea who first perceived that God was first and foremost the God of Love. The two aspects of the Divine are not of course incompatible: far from it, for God is Love, but God is also Good. "Judgement and Mercy: it is the same criss-cross as we find in the later prophets, and as we find in Christ. God's love which, because it is real love, must punish, though God's heart breaks to do it—that is what Hosea saw in God. The revelation of Christ was well prepared for; in Christ, Hosea's picture of God comes to life."

Thus Hosea finely supplemented and completed the spiritual teaching of Amos. Between them, they brought out the two root principles which must guide us all in our search for the Mind of God. "For these two men were, in fact, the great pioneers of higher religious truth, the greatest creative figures in the history of pre-Christian religion and religious thought. They stand between Moses and St. Paul as the two most epoch-making names in the history of the spiritual progress of mankind."¹

¹ The quotations are from Bishop Blunt's *Prophets of Israel* (1929).

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

HOSEA

B.C.	JUDAH.	ISRAEL.
786.	AZARIAH, UZZIAH.	JEROBOAM II.
780.	? Birth of Micah, Isaiah.	? Birth of Hosea.
773.		Shalmanezzer attacks Damascus.
765.	The Plague.	
763.	Total Eclipse of Sun.	
754.	Call of Amos.	
752.	The Earthquake.	
751.	Amos at Beth-el.	
750.	Amos back in Judah.	Call of Hosea (Hos. 1, 2, 3).
747.	? Death of Amos.	ZECHARIAH. Last of House of Jehu. Political chaos.
747.		SHALLUM (Hos. 4).
747.		MENAHAM.
744.	Death of Uzziah. Call of Isaiah.	
744.	JOTHAM.	
741.	AHAZ. Renewal of Idolatry (Hos. 5, 6).	
738.		Tiglath-Pileser raids Syria. Receives tribute of Menahem.
737.		PEKAHIAH (Hos. 7).
735.		PEKAH (Hos. 8-14). ? Death of Hosea. Israel - Syria revolt against T.P. Pekah and Rezin of Syria ally against Judah.
734.		Fall of Damascus.

CHAPTER III

ISAIAH AND MICAH

THE lifetime of Isaiah covers one of the most stirring epochs of Hebrew history, and one which by the grace of God stands out before us more vividly and richly documented than any other. This is due to the wonderful flood of light poured upon it from no less than four different angles. First we have the very full account in the *Second Book of Kings*; secondly, the biography and prophecies of Isaiah himself, as preserved in the *Book of Isaiah*, chaps. 1-39; thirdly, the short but illuminating *Book of Micah*, and last but not least the unique collection of contemporary inscriptions discovered within the past century in Assyria. All this makes the period one of absorbing interest as much for the historian as for the Bible student.

Isaiah, the son of Amoz (not the prophet Amos of course), was a native and resident of Jerusalem, apparently of aristocratic family. His intimacy with the king and his counsellors gave him an inside political knowledge and influence not unlike that of the great ecclesiastics of the Middle Ages.

As his call to prophesy came *in the year that king Uzziah died*,¹ that is in 744 B.C., we may assume that he was born somewhere between 780 B.C. and 770 B.C. His boyhood, therefore, must have coincided with the time when Amos was already

¹ 6¹.

meditating on the evils which evoked at length his passionate protest at Beth-el. Indeed, Isaiah as a youth may well have heard the rugged prophet with his own ears, seen him with his own eyes. Of Hosea, too, he must have known, as reports of that unhappy prophet's pathetic message came seeping over the border from Samaria.

We may even attribute much of the greatness of Isaiah to the fact that he had the insight to combine into one harmonious whole the righteousness and justice of God as taught by Amos with the mercy and loving-kindness of the Lord as proclaimed so clearly by Hosea.

As to the historical background, in Isaiah's young days it was not Judah, but the northern kingdom, Israel, which held the centre of the stage. Under Jeroboam II. prosperity and pride had grown apace in the ivory palaces of Samaria, for her ancient enemy Damascus now found her hands more than full with the menace of Assyrian aggression from the east. Relieved of Syrian encroachment, Israel might have gone far; but she merely used the opportunity as one for further sin, as the pages of Amos and Hosea very clearly show. When the puissant Jeroboam died in 747 B.C., his kingdom began to crumble like a sand-castle in the tide. His son Zechariah, murdered after six months' reign, was the last of the house of Jehu. The assassin Shallum lived less than a month to enjoy his triumph, when Menahem descended from Tirzah upon the capital, slew the usurper and seized the tottering throne.

In the meantime, King Azariah of Judah, or Uzziah as he is called by the prophets, took advantage of Israel's degeneracy to reassert the

southern kingdom's independence. According to the Chronicler, he proved so successful that, growing presumptuous, he was visited with the dreadful scourge of leprosy, and Jotham his son had to act as regent.¹

Jotham, it was seen at once, was a very different man from his father, and all the prophets doubtless longed for the day when he should reign as king in his own right. The death of Uzziah was hailed as the removal of an obstacle in the way of better things, a fact which perhaps explains the pointed manner in which Isaiah's call is dated, not as the first year of Jotham, but "the year in which Uzziah died."

The new king signalized his reverence for holy things by at once rebuilding the upper gate of the Temple in Jerusalem. It seemed the promise of a new era, and it was in the sanctuary thus restored that Isaiah received his call: *In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the LORD sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory.* Isaiah shrank from the tremendous task, but the seraph touched his mouth with a live coal from the altar, so purging his sin. *And I heard the voice of the LORD, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me.*² The reader should turn to this wonderful passage for himself. It strikes at once the dominant note of Isaiah's

¹ 2 Chronicles 26¹⁶.

² 6¹.

message—his intense realization of the awful holiness and purity of God in contrast with the sinfulness of man. Only the searing purge of a white-hot coal taken from the altar can sterilize the infected heart of man and render it worthy to appear before the Holy One of Israel. No previous prophet felt so deeply as Isaiah the unutterable shame and separation of sin.

Unhappily Jotham reigned no more than three years, being succeeded in 741 B.C. by a monarch of very different stamp, Ahaz the idolater and evil-doer. One of the earliest of Isaiah's prophecies tells of the corruptions which were floating in upon Judah's tide of material prosperity, a state of affairs not unlike that which Hosea was simultaneously denouncing in the northern kingdom: *They be filled with customs from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they strike hands with the children of strangers. Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. . . . Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands; that which their own fingers have made.*¹

Even as he uttered these words the storm was beginning to burst. In 738 B.C. Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, invaded Syria, and extorted tribute from Menahem of Samaria.² In the following year Menahem died, to be succeeded by his son Pekahiah. But two years later again, the captain of Pekahiah's forces, Pekah the son of Remaliah by name, assassinated his royal master, and immediately initiated a disastrous change of policy. There was a growing party in Israel who

¹ 2⁶.

² 2 Kings 15¹⁹.

felt that the best hope of beating off Assyria lay in a pan-Palestinian alliance. Old enmities must be forgotten, and any state which refused to accommodate must be taught a lesson. Judging from hints in the Prophets, the hidden hand behind this diplomatic innovation was Egypt, who had her own reasons for desiring the maintenance of the political *status quo* in Palestine.

Now Ahaz of Judah had little inducement to trust an alliance of Israel with Egypt. No doubt there existed a pro-Egyptian party in Jerusalem, but whereas the Pharaoh had long been notorious as a doubtful quantity, Tiglath-Pileser of Nineveh was a very vigorous leader with an army already fully mobilized for attack. Ahaz, therefore, lending a willing ear to those who, like the prophet Isaiah, were definitely opposed to Judah's entry into the anti-Assyrian alliance, refused the overtures of the joint embassy from Samaria and Damascus.

Thereupon the Syro-Ephraimite coalition, namely Rezin of Syria and Pekah of Israel (Ephraim), at once declared war upon Judah. Rezin captured her only important seaport of Elath on the Red Sea,¹ while Pekah raided the districts around Jerusalem itself.²

It is at this crisis in his country's affairs that Isaiah first comes forward as the prophet who made history. Like Hosea of Israel, whose use of marriage and fatherhood as prophetic "similitudes" had so struck the imagination of all thoughtful men only a few years earlier, Isaiah, too, was married. The circumstances of his marriage were happily quite different from those of Hosea. Since he calls his wife "the prophetess,"³

¹ 2 Kings 16⁶.

² 2 Kings 16⁵.

³ 8³.

we may assume that she was in the fullest sense his partner in the work. But like Hosea he had given a prophetically significant name to his son—*Shear-jashub*, A-remnant-shall-return-to-God. It was an augury of hope and confidence in the Lord as the ultimate deliverer of the righteous, and now, when men's hearts were failing them for fear of the northern enemy, Isaiah took the little boy by the hand and encouraged Ahaz. *It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is confederate with Ephraim. And his heart was moved, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest are moved with the wind. Then said the LORD unto Isaiah, Go forth now to meet Ahaz, thou, and Shear-jashub thy son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, in the high way of the fuller's field; and say unto him, Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither let thy heart be faint, because of these two tails of smoking firebrands, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah.*¹

And then the Lord through the voice of the prophet promised a sign to Ahaz that his deliverance should surely come. *The LORD himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. . . . Before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings thou abhorrest shall be forsaken.*²

Thus by the conduit of the upper pool in the year 735 B.C. the prophet was guided to utter the most famous prophecy in history, and one of whose ultimate fulfilment neither he nor King Ahaz could have dreamed. We shall find the like again and again—prophecies whose imme-

¹ 7².

² 7¹⁴.

diate fulfilment in contemporary history by no means exhausted their significance, but which, as we can see now, pointed forward to a far more distant goal.

Having given this "sign" to Ahaz, Isaiah proceeded to give a sign which should be understood by the enemy. In those countries of the ancient East which were impregnated with Babylonian culture, it was an age-old custom to seal a contract in writing upon a tablet of clay in the presence of witnesses, and to deposit it in the chest of a local shrine. Isaiah now took such a tablet and etched upon it with his stylus the laconic inscription *Maher-shalal-hash-baz*,¹ Speed-booty-hasten-spoil, to which he secured the names of Uriah the Priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah as witnesses. A year later, when a second son was born to him by the prophetess, he named it Maher-shalal-hash-baz, and the significance of the cryptic inscription became apparent: *Before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and, My mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be carried away before the king of Assyria.*²

In the very next year (734 B.C.) Damascus was utterly destroyed, as Isaiah had foretold, and twelve years later (722 B.C.) Samaria itself lay a heap of smoking ruins.

In the meantime, however, though impressed by the prophet's forecast, Ahaz could not entirely quieten his fears. The double alliance of Pekah and Rezin enjoyed considerable initial success. The northern districts of Judah were invaded, and at one time it looked as though Jerusalem itself would be besieged. Even Isaiah cried in

¹ 8¹.

² 8⁴.

anguish, *Your country is desolate ; your cities are burnt with fire ; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a booth in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city.*¹ That some such punishment was only to be expected in view of Judah's many sins, he points out very much in the tones of Hosea, denouncing especially the hypocrisy which underlay the elaborate ritual of the Temple: *Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me ; new moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. . . . When ye make many prayers, I will not hear : your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean ; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes ; cease to do evil : learn to do well.*² The sins also which Amos had denounced fifty years earlier are still rife in the city: *Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves ; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards ; they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them.*³ Nevertheless, the Prophet assures his hearers of God's readiness to forgive and to restore. *Zion shall be redeemed with judgement, and her converts with righteousness.*⁴

Ahaz, however, could not resist making assurance doubly sure. Tiglath-Pileser was already in motion against Damascus, and, as Isaiah very well knew, needed no inducement to destroy that rich and troublesome city which blocked his approach towards the Eldorado of Egypt. But Ahaz actually went out of his way to offer the

¹ I 7.² I 13.³ I 23.⁴ I 27.

Assyrian a large money payment to induce him to do what he had already fully decided upon.¹ In the upshot, Tiglath-Pileser invaded Syria and Northern Israel: the Syro-Ephraimite attack upon Judah of course immediately collapsed: and in the following year, 734 B.C., Damascus was destroyed.

Of this event we have the cuneiform contemporary inscription as a record:

“ Rezin of Damascus fled alone to save his life, and like a mouse he entered the gate of his city. His nobles I captured with my own hands, and impaled alive upon stakes for all to see. Damascus I captured, and carried off thousands of captives.”

Thus in ample measure was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: *Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap.*²

About the same time was born to the young wife of Ahaz, Abi by name, a baby boy whose birth may well have seemed a sign from heaven that God was indeed with His people once again. At the news of the royal heir-apparent, coinciding as it did with that of the Ephraim-Syrian defeat, the people could joyfully cry Immanuel, God-is-with-us, and upon the child named Hezekiah, so auspiciously born into the world, the prophets must at once have fixed their hopes. *For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*³ Only dimly perhaps did the prophet foresee that, wonderful though King Hezekiah proved to be, a far more wonderful Child would over seven centuries later fulfil his word.

¹ 2 Kings 16⁸.

² 17¹.

³ 9⁶.

The immediate effect of this deliverance from the northern peril was not, however, what the prophet might fairly have expected. Ahaz visited his supposed defender Tiglath-Pileser in Damascus, was impressed by the design of a heathen altar he saw there, and actually had it introduced into the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem.¹ The closing years of his reign, in fact, were marked by the rankest ingratitude to the Lord who had saved him, and by social evils of every sort. There seemed to be a recrudescence of that senseless luxury and social oppression which had been so rife in the days of Amos, and very much in the tone of the older prophet are Isaiah's rebukes. *What mean ye that ye crush my people, and grind the face of the poor? . . . The daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.*² And so on. The whole passage might well be read by the daughters of to-day.

To this sad period too belongs the beautiful elegy of the Neglected Vineyard, a poem which Hosea, we may be sure, would have been glad to write. *Let me sing for my wellbeloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My wellbeloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill. . . .*³ Here the Lord declares his great love for Judah, and reproaches her for ill-requiting His tender care. *What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?*⁴

In the meantime, though the voice of Hosea

¹ 2 Kings 16¹⁰.

² 3¹⁵.

³ 5¹.

⁴ 5⁴.

the prophet had now been stilled for ever, the doom which he had foretold for Israel drew on apace. King Pekah had been allowed by Tiglath-Pileser to retain his throne, but in 733 B.C. he was slain by a conspirator, Hoshea, who at once, though secretly, began to negotiate with Egypt against his Assyrian overlord. Tiglath-Pileser, however, was now coming to the end of his powers, and within five years the destroyer of Damascus was dead. To many of his chafing tributaries it must have seemed that the time for revolt had come. But Isaiah warns them that the new king of Assyria will be even more terrible than the old. *Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of thee, because the rod that smote thee is broken : for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a basilisk, and his fruit shall be a fiery flying serpent.*¹

Hoshea of Israel, however, refused the warning. Instigated by the Pharaoh So, or Seve, he revolted in 724 B.C. against the "basilisk" Shalmanezar V., and within the year found his capital closely invested by the angry Assyrian. Egypt proving as usual a broken reed, the siege continued for over two bitter years. In the midst of it Shalmanezar died. But his death brought no relief. Out of the "basilisk" came forth the "fiery flying serpent" foretold by Isaiah, namely King Sargon, under whose impetuous assault Samaria at last surrendered, in 722 B.C. *Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty,*² cried the prophet at the commencement of the long anticipated siege. *The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under*

¹ 14²⁹.

² 28¹.

*foot.*¹ But let not Judah rejoice in the downfall of her sister state, nor think to escape the same punishment save by repentance of her sins. *Now therefore be ye not scorers, lest your bands be made strong: for a consummation, and that determined, have I heard from the LORD, the LORD of hosts, upon the whole earth.*²

MICAH

IT is at this juncture that we first hear the prophetic voice of Micah the Morashtite uplifted in denunciation against tottering Samaria and all who like her shall sin against the Lord.

Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah, but of very different circumstances. In many respects he must have seemed an Amos risen from the dead. Like Amos he was a man of humble origin, the son of a nobody, a countryman and a fearless critic of the evils he saw around him. Micah says to Judah what Amos had said to Israel, and in the fulfilment of the former prophecy, now visible for all to see in the present distress of Samaria, he discerns a dreadful foretaste of the fate in store for the sister city Jerusalem should repentance be delayed. He dwells, therefore, not exultingly, but sadly, upon the sufferings of the northern kingdom, ever and anon swinging round to point a warning finger at his fellow-countrymen of the south. *What is the transgression of Jacob? is it not Samaria? and what are the high places of Judah? are they not Jerusalem? Therefore I will make Samaria as an heap of the field, and as the*

¹ 28³.

² 28²².

plantings of a vineyard: and I will pour down the stones thereof into the valley, and I will discover the foundations thereof. . . . For her wounds are incurable: for it is come even unto Judah; it reacheth unto the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.¹ In imagination already he sees the Assyrian coming down "like a wolf on the fold," destroying one after another the villages so dear to him—Beth-le-Aphrah, Shaphir, Zaanan, Beth-ezel, Maroth—until at last they come even unto the gate of Jerusalem itself.²

With the peasant's burning love for his gardens and homesteads, he cries aloud like an echo of Amos against the "land-grabbers" of Judah. *They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away: and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage. . . . The women of my people ye cast out from their pleasant houses; from their young children ye take away my glory for ever.³ With the countryman's ruthless sincerity he strips the veil from the so-called leaders of Judah. *They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.⁴**

Finally the great denunciation closes in a thunderous crash upon a prophecy of doom so appalling that for ever afterwards it was remembered as a miracle of inspired foresight. Picture this unpolished countryman, with his shabby prophet's mantle, his wild hair and beard and his dusty sandals, striding through the fashionable quarters of Jerusalem, then at the height of her prosperity, and shaking his staff at her embattled

¹ I 5, 9.² I 11.³ 2 2, 9.⁴ 3 10.

walls, her marble palaces, and the burnished pinnacles of the Temple itself, as he cried aloud, *Therefore shall Zion for your sake be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.*¹

No doubt, just as Amos had been reported to Jeroboam, so Micah, or Micaiah as he was also called, was reported to King Hezekiah as a dangerous and sedition-mongering lunatic. But Hezekiah, instead of putting the prophet to death, took heed to his warning and resolved to reform the ways of Jerusalem and of the court. In view of this, the downfall of the house of David was postponed awhile. But a hundred and thirty years later, when Jerusalem was indeed on the point of destruction, the prophecy of this humble Morashtite was quoted, and the effect of his warning upon the king was contrasted with the treatment received by Jeremiah at the hands of Jehoiakim. The story is told in the *Book of Jeremiah*, where we read that the elders of Jerusalem, defending the prophet, reminded them how *Micaiah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, . . . saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts: Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him at all to death? did he not fear the LORD, and intreat the favour of the LORD, and the LORD repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them?*²

A striking passage indeed, for it is the only case in the Old Testament of a definite quotation with the name of its author from the writings of

¹ 3¹².

² Jeremiah 26¹⁸.

the prophets of Israel. That this honour should be accorded to the country-bred Micah, as well as the fact that his voice was not altogether drowned by that of his great contemporary Isaiah, reminds us that we must not judge a prophet solely by his extant writings. The *Book of Micah* is very small: but like other tiny books of the "minor" prophets, it probably contains only a fraction of the words he really spoke, or even wrote. It is evident that he was a worthy collaborator with Isaiah in the work of stirring the conscience of Judah and urging on the notable reformation of worship and morality which took place in Jerusalem shortly after the fall of the northern kingdom.

HEZEKIAH AND ISAIAH

It was natural that the prophets should drive home the lesson of this terrible collapse both in their spoken prophecies and in their written history of the times. The tones of Isaiah and Micah may be clearly heard in the austere commentary which the prophet-author of the *Book of Kings* makes upon this well-deserved penalty for sin.¹ While, therefore, the erring children of Israel were being carried into exile in Assyria, and their country colonized by a racial medley of conquered peoples, Hezekiah set out to reform the children of Judah before it should be too late, lest they too should suffer a like punishment. *He removed the high places, and brake the pillars, and cut down the Asherah.*² He went, indeed, much further than the best of his predecessors had ever

¹ 2 Kings 17⁷.

² 2 Kings 18⁴.

gone. From Hosea onwards the prophets had at last come to the conclusion that all images, sacred emblems and relics were a danger to real religion. Hosea had denounced the Golden Calves of Israel: Hezekiah now relentlessly destroyed a Brazen Serpent which had been preserved from time immemorial as a relic of Moses himself, horrifying the old-fashioned by calling it *Nehushtan*,¹ just a Bit of Brass, but thereby greatly gladdening the hearts of the prophets.

The rest of the reign of good King Hezekiah was a splendid example of the goodness of the Lord to them that trust in Him. Obedient to the counsel of Isaiah, Hezekiah wisely acknowledged the suzerainty of Assyria and turned a deaf ear to the blandishments of Egypt. It was well he did so, for a premature Philistine revolt was summarily crushed by the destruction of Ashdod. This, too, Isaiah had foreseen. *In the year that Tartan came unto Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it,*² Isaiah performed one of those striking symbolic actions or "similitudes" for which the prophets were famous. For a long time he walked naked and barefoot about the streets of Jerusalem in token of the shame which Assyria should inflict upon Egypt. This sufficed for a while to silence the pro-Egyptian party who were always trying to get the ear of the king, and of whom Shebna, the Syrian-born chancellor of the court, was Isaiah's chief antagonist.

Hezekiah, however, eventually began to forget the lessons of Samaria's fall, and it became a harder and harder task for the prophet to control

¹ 2 Kings 18⁴.

² 20¹.

his policy. No doubt the king saw himself as a second Solomon, and when the ambassadors of far distant countries came to interview him with fair messages from their famous sovereigns, was greatly flattered. He was especially touched, on recovery from a somewhat serious illness, to receive the congratulations of a potentate as far distant as Babylon.¹ This ancient city was at that time reduced to a position of very third-rate importance, being nominally a municipality within the empire of Nineveh. But quite recently an adventurer named Merodach-Baladan had gained control in Babylon, proclaiming himself king. He now sent ambassadors with a present to Hezekiah, congratulating him on his recovery, and Hezekiah very foolishly let them into the secret of Jerusalem's lately acquired prosperity, showing them his treasures of silver, gold, spices, oil, and armaments of war. Isaiah sternly denounced the vanity which dangled such a tempting prize before the rapacious eyes of the Far East, and even foresaw the distant day when Babylon, once more supreme among the nations, should remember those treasures and carry them all away. *Behold, the days come, that all that is in thine house, and that which thy fathers have laid up in store until this day, shall be carried to Babylon: nothing shall be left, saith the LORD.*² This prophecy was literally fulfilled in 586 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar took and destroyed Jerusalem.

For a time Hezekiah was impressed, but within a few years a great temptation was to come upon him. In 705 B.C. the invincible Sargon died, and all the world flared up in revolt against the

¹ 39¹.

² 39⁶.

Assyrian oppression. Embassies from every nation of the Near East flocked along the roads to Jerusalem, for it now became evident that the hills of Judah were the only barrier to Nineveh's further advance upon the riches of the Nile, and Egypt had her envoys planted in every chancellory. Ethiopia, now the dominant factor in Egyptian politics, was among the most insistent of Hezekiah's tempters. *Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, cries Isaiah sadly, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia : that sendeth ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus upon the waters, saying, Go, ye swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people terrible from their beginning onward.*¹ But neither to Ethiopia nor to Egypt nor to any of their allies must Hezekiah listen, for the triumph of Assyria over all who oppose her is foredoomed.

No temporary changes of circumstance ever blinded Isaiah to the inevitability of Assyria's success. The brood of "basilisks" and "fiery serpents" seemed inexhaustible, and he saw at once that in the new king Sennacherib the world was to find a more terrible scourge than ever. *Ho Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, the staff in whose hand is mine indignation ! I will send him against a profane nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.*² As the Assyrian has done to Calno and Carchemish, Hamath and Arpad, Samaria and Damascus, so he will do to any nation that is mad enough to oppose him.

But, alas ! Hezekiah after eighteen years of

¹ 18¹.

² 10⁵.

prosperous rule has now forgotten the lessons of the great war in which Samaria fell. The voice of Isaiah is drowned in the clamour of many false prophets, and the arguments of the pro-Egyptian party seem to have more cogency than the visions of the quietist. In those days Isaiah's old opponent, Shebna the chancellor, was in high favour at court, and had even started to build for himself a tomb of regal splendour after the best models of the Valley of the Kings in Egypt. To him, complacently watching his stonemasons at work, came the scornful prophet. Let not Shebna think he will die in his bed and be buried in his marble sepulchre. The Lord *will surely turn and toss thee like a ball into a large country ; there shalt thou die, and there shall be the chariots of thy glory, thou shame of thy lord's house. And I will thrust thee from thine office. . . . And I will call my servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah, . . . and I will commit thy government into his hand.*¹ As Amos had denounced Amaziah in Beth-el fifty years earlier, so Isaiah foredooms the enemy of the Lord in Jerusalem, and with him the evil policy which bade fair to destroy the Holy City.

For Hezekiah had at last made up his mind to drop the pilot who had so long and so successfully helped him steer the ship of state. The wiles of Shabataka, the new Pharaoh of Egypt, prevailed, and when Hezekiah consented to imprison Padi king of Ekron in the dungeons of Jerusalem, the die was cast. For Ekron was a faithful vassal of Assyria, and it was Assyria's inveterate enemy Egypt who had deposed Padi from his throne. Isaiah foresees at once the inevitable consequences

of Hezekiah's rash act: the avenging march of the Assyrian is seen by the prophetic vision as clearly as though it had already begun. Jerusalem is besieged! *Ho Ariel, Ariel, the city where David encamped! . . . I will camp against thee round about, and will lay siege against thee with a fort.*¹ *He (Sennacherib) shaketh his hand at the mount of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.*²

Isaiah was not the only one to foresee the peril. While Jerusalem rang with his cries, the countryside listened trembling to the prophecies of Micah, no less terrible in their import. *Is there no king in thee?* he complains bitterly of the Holy City; *is thy counsellor perished, that pangs have taken hold of thee as of a woman in travail? . . . And now many nations are assembled against thee, that say, Let her be defiled, and let our eye see its desire upon Zion.*³

But as the Assyrian armies drew near to the city, and the promised reinforcements from Egypt showed no signs of materializing, the heart of Hezekiah failed within him. What if Isaiah and Micah had been right after all? He knew well enough that his counsellor had not perished: he was there at summons, when the king should once more desire him. There was no comfort in Shebna now: every hour that found the Assyrian a few miles nearer, and perfidious Egypt as far away as ever, increased the king's certainty that in listening to Shebna and his friends he had made a terrible mistake. Nay, Shebna himself had lost confidence. . . .

Once more King Hezekiah had a change of heart at the eleventh hour: once more he received

¹ 29¹.

² 10³².

³ Micah 4^{9, 11}.

Isaiah back into favour, and determined to put no more his trust in princes, but to trust in the Lord alone. Upon these good tidings, the visions of Isaiah and Micah grew clearer still. It was too late to avert the invasion of Sennacherib, or to withhold his armies from raiding the land. But the worst disasters would somehow be averted: the Holy City itself should be saved from desecration, and eventually it would not be Hezekiah but Sennacherib who should perish by the sword.

Isaiah's message is now full of comfort and encouragement. *O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the Assyrian : though he smite thee with the rod, and lift up his staff against thee, after the manner of Egypt. For yet a very little while, and the indignation shall be accomplished, and mine anger, in their destruction.¹ And his burden shall depart from off thy shoulder, and his yoke from off thy neck.² At eventide behold terror ; and before the morning they are not. This is the portion of them that spoil us, and the lot of them that rob us.³ The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel . . . shall be as a dream, a vision of the night.⁴*

Equally inspiring, Micah, looking forward into the still more distant future, prophesies that a king of Jerusalem, of the lineage of David, of the very village where David had been born, should one day win a lasting victory for Judah. *Thou, Beth-lehem Ephrathah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be a ruler in Israel ; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.⁵ . . .*

Not for many hundreds of years was this

¹ 10²⁴. ² 10²⁷. ³ 17¹⁴. ⁴ 29⁷. ⁵ Micah 5².

prophecy to be fulfilled to its full extent by the birth of the Holy Child in Bethlehem. It is one of many half-conscious prophecies of the Messiah, as though a cry arose unaware from the stricken heart of Israel, longing for something better than man alone could ever give.

In the meantime Sennacherib continued to advance, while Hezekiah made hasty preparations to resist a siege. One after another Tyre, Sidon, Arvad, Gebal, Ashdod, and the rest either surrendered or took the consequences. By a wonderful stroke of good fortune we have Sennacherib's own very detailed account of this campaign inscribed upon the so-called "Taylor Prism," where, sure enough, written in that queer cuneiform script whose secret has only lately been discovered, we find the name of "Hezekiah the Jew," and many references to his part in the war. But the most vivid narrative of the approach to Jerusalem is preserved in the famous chapters 36 and 37 of the *Book of Isaiah*.

Here we read how Sennacherib invaded Northern Judah, and marched steadily south until held up for the moment by the strong fortifications of Lachish. From here he sent an armed force to Jerusalem demanding the surrender of the city. The Assyrian shouted aloud and in the Hebrew language so that the rank and file upon the battlements might hear and understand. It is almost a crime to retell the story of the negotiations, a story at once so priceless as literature and so accessible to all. Suffice it to say that the Assyrian poured scorn upon the God of Israel, if it was He upon Whom they were relying to defend them. Hezekiah was panic-stricken. He sent

his officers to Isaiah, covered with penitential sackcloth. Let the prophet pray as he had never prayed before, for nothing but a miracle could save the city! But Isaiah calmly bade him once more, *Be not afraid of the words that thou hast heard, wherewith the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed me. Behold, I will put a spirit in him, and he shall hear a rumour, and shall return unto his own land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land.*¹ So Hezekiah took heart again, although he took the precaution of despatching together with his message of defiance a valuable present of gold and silver to the greedy Assyrian.

Sennacherib, however, was not satisfied. Having demolished Lachish, he had now moved on to Libnah, and from thence he sent a written letter to Hezekiah more peremptory than the former. But the king had now resolved on his course of action. Taking the roll of parchment into the Temple, he spread it before the Lord, and prayed for succour: *O LORD our God, save us from his (Sennacherib's) hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD, even thou only.*² In answer to this prayer the Lord sent a message of assurance to the king through the mouth of His servant the prophet. Let Hezekiah confidently bid defiance to the godless Assyrian, saying, *The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.*³ . . . *The king of Assyria shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there. . . . By the way that he came, by the same shall he return. . . . For I will*

¹ 37⁶.² 37²⁰.³ 37²².

*defend this city to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.*¹

The part which Isaiah played in this crisis of his country, and the marvellous manner in which his prophecy was fulfilled, has remained firmly planted in the memory of all who trust in the Lord even to this day. For the incredible happened. When Sennacherib with his invincible armies was but a few miles short of the Holy City, and it seemed as though nothing could save her, suddenly he heard a report that the Egyptian forces under the leadership of their field-marshal Tirhakah were advancing to the attack. He turned aside to encounter them, and, according to his own account, won a signal victory at El-tekeh. The way was then clear for the long-deferred assault on Jerusalem. But as the prophet had foreseen, a rumour of disaffection in distant Nineveh came to Sennacherib's ears, and he suddenly struck off across the Syrian desert towards his home. Jerusalem was saved, and never again was she seriously threatened by the Assyrian power. As to Sennacherib, he was assassinated, as Isaiah had foretold, twenty years later (680 B.C.) by two of his own sons in the temple of Nisroch his god at Nineveh.

Great was the relief in Jerusalem, and great the joy of prophets, that the Lord should so have manifested His power and love among the nations. Hope rose high in every breast, and never had the coming of God's Kingdom here on earth seemed so certain or so nigh at hand. Visions of a new Golden Age lightened the closing years of Isaiah, and found expression in his utterances. *There*

shall be no gloom to her that was in anguish.¹ . . . The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light : they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.² Nor should the light be restricted to the children of Israel alone: all the world should see it blazing from the heights of Zion. Both Isaiah and Micah now called to mind an ancient prophecy of some Unknown Seer, which both have quoted in their Books. Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge between the nations, and shall reprove many peoples ; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks : nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.³

In this Golden Age, too, Isaiah foresaw more clearly than any of his predecessors the advent of a King of kings, reigning from the tabernacle of David, who should sum up in His person all that was best in the Anointed of the Lord, a Messiah in fact, a Prince of Peace. *There shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse, . . . and the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, . . . and his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. . . . And the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid ; . . . and a little child shall lead them. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain : for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.⁴*

On this happy and triumphant note the voice of the aged prophet fell silent. He had lived through the most momentous crisis in Israel's

¹ 9¹. ² 9². ³ Micah 4¹ ; Isaiah 2². ⁴ II 1, 6, 9.

history, and had had more influence than any one man upon the shaping of her destiny. During his lifetime he had seen Jerusalem at the nadir of her fortunes under the heel of Israel: had witnessed the decline and fall of Syria, the collapse of Samaria, the first alarms of the world-shaking clash between Assyria and Egypt, the important religious reforms of Hezekiah, and the miraculous deliverance of the Holy City from Sennacherib at the eleventh hour. And now the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof came to bear him away to the great Beyond where at last his visions should be realized in full.

So passed one of the very greatest of the prophets of Israel. Soon men began to recollect and to gather together the oracles which had fallen from his lips. Unfortunately they assembled them with but little editorial skill. Perhaps the death of Hezekiah the good, followed by the accession of Manasseh the very bad, during whose reign the men of God were persecuted and Jerusalem filled with innocent blood, compelled the prophetic editors to hasty and furtive measures. At any rate, the scattered fragments of Isaiah's utterances were thrown together with little semblance of order, and it is only during the last century or so of intensive study that we have been able to rearrange them in their chronological sequence, and so to understand fully their import.

Moreover, so magnetic was the attraction of Isaiah's tremendous personality, that many prophetic oracles of unknown authorship were drawn within the covers of his Book. We shall see later on that chapters 40 to the end are mainly the work of younger "Isaiahs" who lived centuries

later,¹ but even within the first thirty-nine chapters there are passages, beautiful and inspiring in themselves, for which the older Isaiah was not directly responsible. Yet enough and more than enough of his authentic work remains for us to realize something of his abiding power.

THE PASSING OF MICAH

HIS younger contemporary Micah seems to have lived long enough to see the sad change of heart that came with the accession of Manasseh to the throne of Judah in 696 B.C. Forgotten now were the reforms of Hezekiah. Once more the land was defiled with every abomination of idolatry, and with the blood of those who protested against it. One last oracle from the prophet's lips seems to belong to these dark days, and it is one of the most beautiful, albeit one of the saddest in all prophecy. It has been called "the most important in the prophetic literature, epitomizing the teaching of the Old Testament, as it prepares us for the revelation of the New."

Jehovah is pictured as pleading, almost like a suppliant, for the love of Israel. *O my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? testify against me.*² He reminds them of all that He has done for them: what will they do in return? *Wherewith shall I come before the LORD, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offerings?*³ No, not with mere ritual observance shall a man

¹ See Chapter VIII., The Second Isaiah, and Chapter IX., The Third Isaiah.

² 6³.

³ 6⁶.

requite the goodness of the Lord. *He hath showed thee, O man, what is good : and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God* ¹ It is the heart of religion in a nutshell.

But there were few who practised such an ideal in the days of Manasseh. *The godly man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men : they all lie in wait for blood ; they hunt every man his brother with a net.*² Spies and informers betray the godly to the oppressor. *Trust ye not in a friend, put ye not confidence in a guide : keep the doors of thy mouth from her that lieth in thy bosom. . . . A man's enemies are the men of his own house.*³ Perhaps the aged prophet himself had some such enemies, of whom he was only too well aware. At any rate, his voice is suddenly cut off, and it may well be that he was among the martyrs who suffered under the sword of Manasseh.

¹ 6⁸.² 7².³ 7⁵.

PROBABLE DATES OF ISAIAH I-XXXIX

I (735): 2¹⁻⁴ (700): 2^{5f} (739): 3, 4, 5¹⁻²⁴ (730): 5^{25f} (727): 6 (744): 7, 8 (735): 9¹⁻⁷ (700): 9^{8f}, 10¹⁻⁴ (727): 10^{5f} (701): 11 (700): [12, 13, 14¹⁻²³ Second Isaiah]: 14²⁴⁻²⁷ (701): 14^{28f} (726): 15, 16 (714): 17¹⁻¹¹ (734): 17^{12f}, 18 (702): [19¹⁻¹⁸ Third Isaiah]: 19^{19f} (700): 20 (711): [21 Second Isaiah]: 22, 23 (702): 24, 25, 26, 27, Third Isaiah]: 28 (722): 29, 30, 31 (702): 32¹⁻⁸ (700): 32^{8f} (730): 33 (701): [34, 35, Third Isaiah]: [36, 37 (701): 38, 39 (711)].

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

ISAIAH AND MICAH

B.C.	JUDAH.	ISRAEL.
786.	AZARIAH, UZZIAH.	JEROBOAM II.
772.	? Birth of Isaiah and Micah.	
751.		Amos at Beth-el.
750.		Call of Hosea.
747.	? Death of Amos.	ZECHARIAH.
747.		SHALLUM.
747.	(JOTHAM regent.)	MENAHAM.
744.	Death of Uzziah.	
744.	JOTHAM.	
	Call of Isaiah (<i>Isaiah</i> 6).	
741.	AHAZ.	
738.	(<i>Isaiah</i> 2 ^{5f.})	Tiglath - Pileser's raid on Syria.
737.	? Death of Hosea.	PEKAHIAH.
735.		PEKAH.
735.	Syro-Ephraimite attack on Judah (<i>Isaiah</i> 1, 7, 8).	
734.	Ahaz appeals to Tiglath- Pileser, who invades Syria.	
	Fall of Damascus. (<i>Isaiah</i> 17 ¹⁻¹¹).	
733.		HOSHEA
730.	(<i>Isaiah</i> 3; 4; 5 ¹⁻²⁴ ; 32 ^{9f.}).	
727.	Death of Tiglath-Pileser. Succeeded by Shalman- ezer V.	
726.	Death of Ahaz. (<i>Isaiah</i> 14 ^{28f.}).	Hoshea pays tribute to Shalmanezzer, but intrigues with So (<i>Isaiah</i> 9 ^{8v.} ; 10 ¹⁻⁴ ; 5 ^{35f.}).
725.	HEZEKIAH.	
724.		Hoshea rebels against Assyria.
		Shalmanezzer attacks Samaria.
	Call of Micah (<i>Micah</i> 1; 2 ¹⁻¹¹ ; 3).	
722.	Sargon, King of Assyria.	Fall of Samaria (<i>Isaiah</i> 28).
		Exile of Ten Tribes.
	Isaiah and Micah work for Reform.	

B.C.	JUDAH.	ISRAEL.
721.	Hezekiah's Reformation.	
712.	Palestinian revolt against Sargon (<i>Isaiah</i> 15; 16.)	
711.	Tartan takes Ashdod, Tyre, etc. (<i>Isaiah</i> 20). Sickness of Hezekiah. Embassy of Merodach-Baladan (<i>Isaiah</i> 38, 39).	
705.	Sargon succeeded by Sennacherib. Ethiopian embassy to Hezekiah.	
703.	Shabataka instigates revolt. Hezekiah imprisons Padi of Ekron, so revolting against Assyria. Shebna and pro-Egyptian party oppose Isaiah. (<i>Isaiah</i> 22).	
702.	Sennacherib's advance. (<i>Isaiah</i> 10 ^{5ff} ; 14 ²⁴⁻²⁷); 17 ^{12ff} ; 18; 23; 29; 30; 31. <i>Micah</i> 4 ^{9ff}).	
701.	Hezekiah blockaded in Jerusalem (<i>Isaiah</i> 36; 37). Hezekiah defies him (<i>Isaiah</i> 33). Sennacherib's mysterious retreat.	
700.	Enhanced prestige of Isaiah and Micah (<i>Micah</i> 5; <i>Isaiah</i> 9 ¹⁻⁷ ; 11). (<i>Micah</i> 4 ¹⁻³ = <i>Isaiah</i> 2 ²⁻⁴).	
	Death of Hezekiah (<i>Isaiah</i> 19 ^{19ff} ; 32 ¹⁻⁸).	
696.	MANASSEH. ? Martyrdom of Isaiah. Revival of idolatry (<i>Micah</i> 6, 7).	
695.	? Martyrdom of Micah.	

CHAPTER IV

THE DEUTERONOMIST

WITH the death of Hezekiah, king of Judah, in 696 B.C., the golden age of prophecy came to an end. Great prophets were still to come, but never again did the mantle fall on figures quite so outstanding in spiritual genius as those of Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah. In the brief fifty years which brought the eighth century to its glorious close they had lifted the religion of Israel out of the semi-darkness which had swathed it for a thousand years, and almost instantaneously floodlit the Hill of Zion with a light that ever since has guided and inspired the world.

Yet at the beginning of the seventh century the light seemed to have been utterly and hopelessly extinguished. Manasseh had no sooner ascended the throne of Jerusalem than he showed himself one of the worst characters that had ever held the sceptre of David. Child though he was, the seeds which germinated so disastrously for religion during the fifty-five years of his long reign had already begun to sprout, and free rein was given from the first to those evil counsellors whose antipathy to higher ideals had remained but pent-up fires during the reign of Hezekiah.

Within a very short space of time all the work of the prophetic reformation resulting from the preaching of Isaiah and Micah had been undone. The soul-destroying "high places" pulled down

by his father,¹ Manasseh now defiantly rebuilt; altars were once more set up to Ashtaroth, Chemosh, Milcom, and the local Baals all over Judah, and the young king made a sacred pole, or Asherah, in honour of the goddess of that name, specially for his own use. The abomination of heathen altars was seen even within the Temple itself, altars erected to divinities hitherto unknown in Jewry, a novelty copied perhaps from Assyrian models, namely the Hosts of Heaven, the Sun, the Moon, the Stars. Once again the base superstitions of witchcraft and augury were seen in the land, and every species of immorality practised under pretext of religion reared up its loathsome head.

Worst of all, incredible though it may seem at this stage of Israel's development, the monstrous offering of human sacrifice was renewed, for Manasseh *made his son to pass through the fire*,² as a sacrifice to Moloch in the charnel valley of Topheth, a sin especially denounced in the *Book of Deuteronomy*—*Every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods, for even their sons and their daughters do they burn in the fire to their gods.*³ In fact no deed of shame was omitted to prove that the spoilt young princeling intended to rule without fear of God or respect of man.

Against this ruthless tyranny even the prophets were powerless. Some of the more intrepid, the disciples of Isaiah and Micah, did indeed lift up their voice in bitter denunciation of the new king's policy. Their names are for ever lost, but the memory of their words persisted long enough to be recorded in later and happier years. For the

¹ 2 Kings 21³.

² 2 Kings 21⁶.

³ Deuteronomy 12³¹.

Book of Kings tells us that the LORD spake by his servants the prophets, saying, *Because Manasseh king of Judah hath done these abominations, . . . therefore thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel, Behold, I bring such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle.*¹ Although for the moment Assyria remained quiescent, and the formidable Sennacherib was nearing the end of his strength, yet sinful Judah should not escape the fate of sinful Israel. *I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, and the plummet of the house of Ahab : and I will wipe Jerusalem as a man wipeth a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down.*²

But the voice of the prophets was quickly stifled in their throats. *Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.*³ It is possible that among the noble army of martyrs under this red terror were numbered the aged Isaiah and Micah. For seventy long years the righteous were denied all freedom of speech, and the "famine of the word of the Lord" foretold by Amos prevailed in the land.⁴ For during all that time, throughout the reigns of Manasseh and Amon and the early years of the boy-king Josiah, not a single successor to Micah among the writing prophets of Israel was found, and true prophecy seemed a thing of the past.

But in reality it was far otherwise. Driven underground, the fires of prophecy were burning with a flame all the fiercer for their suppression. It is only during the last century or so of Biblical

¹ 2 Kings 21¹⁰.

³ 2 Kings 21¹⁸.

² 2 Kings 21¹³.

⁴ Amos 8¹¹.

study that men have realized how marvellously God turned the blood-stained darkness of those terrible years to His own ends. Even now we can only dimly surmise what was going on, what industry, what genius, what spiritual energy, what resourcefulness and courage there must have been among the men of God through that long night to prepare for the harvest which in a happier day some eighty years hence King Josiah the Reformer was enabled to reap.

For it was during the reign of Manasseh, almost beyond a doubt, that many of the ancient documents of the Old Testament Scriptures, as we understand the term to-day, were first collected, written up, and bound together as a sacred book. Not of course in its final form, for the work of editing continued for many generations, and the priestly schools of the exile and of Ezra had still to add the finishing touches to the sacred text. But the project of the sacred library was formed.

For then it was that the old prophetic narratives of the Pentateuch, namely the Jehovistic version of the south (J) and the Elohist version of the north (E), were assembled together in one harmonious whole. The prophets, whether of Israel or Judah, had never recognized the political division of the kingdom as affecting the religious unity of the children of Abraham. The Jehovah Whom they worshipped in Jerusalem was the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob Whom they worshipped in Beth-el or Dan, although in minor details the traditions which gathered round those shrines might vary. The faith of their fathers was one.

Now, however, in view of the fall of the northern kingdom of Samaria, and the peril to pure religion under Manasseh in Jerusalem, it became essential to attain a single authoritative clear-cut statement of Israel's history and doctrine around which all true worshippers of Jehovah might rally. With freedom of speech suppressed, the written word became of supreme importance. Hence J, as we call the Jehovistic version, and E, as we call the Elohist, were combined into one authoritative document—JE. It could have been no easy task. Often it meant the making of a difficult choice, where one or other venerated but now superfluous tradition had to be discarded. Sometimes, indeed, both were retained in part, thus accounting for some of the "doublets" or twin versions of the same story, which the most casual reader must notice in the sacred text.

But the mechanical dovetailing of the two traditions was the least part of the prophet-editors' work. Not only did they rewrite the old narrative where necessary in such a perfect literary style, poetry or prose, that it afterwards became and ever remained the standard of classical Hebrew, but they purged the ancient legends of archaic dross, fitted them into the logical sequence not only of the historical narrative but of doctrinal development, and interwove within the immemorial warp that golden thread of the newer and deeper knowledge of God's love and law which the great prophets of the preceding century had bequeathed to Israel.

In the cold phraseology of the Higher Criticism, in fact, the famous "Deuteronomic Revision" was taking place, a phrase which under a forbidding

technical term surely hides one of the greatest romances of Hebrew history.

The evidence for the existence of "Deuteronomic Schools" of prophetically minded scribes busily engaged during the reign of Manasseh and his successors is, of course, purely circumstantial. It depends entirely upon the "internal evidence" of the Hebrew text, a "reading between the lines" of which only the expert Hebraist and Biblical scholar is capable. Yet after over a century of investigation, the closest ever accorded to the Old Testament, the scholars are substantially unanimous in their conclusions on this point.

Of explicit or external information regarding the personality or even the existence of these Deuteronomic scribes there is none, any more than there is of the existence of Homer as the author of the *Iliad*. Yet the writing marked off by the critics as "Deuteronomic" is full of individuality and character. After all, the fact that something has been written is very cogent evidence that somebody, some human hand of flesh and blood, must have written it. And from the substance of the writing much can be deduced about the personality of the writer.

Picture then, during these years of persecution, a score of indefatigable "monasteries" of prophet-scribes working away at their manuscripts against the day when the King should come into his own again. In Jerusalem itself there is no safety, but there are still loyal peasants in the mountain fastnesses who will protect them, warn them when the spear-heads of Manasseh's emissaries flash upon the high road, hide them in secret chambers, provide them with another such table, stool, and

candlestick as the widow once furnished for Elisha.¹ Once more, perhaps, we have the spectacle of the prophets of the Lord hiding by fifties in a cave.² And it may be that concealed in rock-crannies, dry cisterns, or in some dark corner of a granary were the ancient tablets, the fragments of vellum and parchment, the prepared skins and pen and ink the discovery of which meant death to their possessor.

Amongst such fragments the most dangerous were undoubtedly the written extracts from the prophecies of the previous century. By this time, perhaps, the rolls containing Amos and Hosea had been thrown into more or less their present shape. But the great accumulated memoranda of Isaiah's utterances had yet to be sorted out and transcribed. Is it any wonder that their arrangement and editing under such circumstances left much to be desired according to modern standards? When, in reading the *Book of Isaiah*, we find that we have to dodge to and fro and here and there in order to sort out his prophecies into their proper sequence and to understand their drift, let the fact remind us of the difficulties and dangers under which those ancient editors worked, the Wycliffes and Tyndales of twenty-six centuries ago.

But the labours of these sons of the prophets were not confined to writing up the prophets of the eighth century, or even to compiling in its unsurpassable literary beauty the narrative of the Pentateuch. Recognizing that the history of the Chosen People had not ended with Moses, they made it their business to write the annals of Israel from the entry into the Promised Land up to their

¹ 2 Kings 4¹⁰.

² 1 Kings 18⁴.

own day. Now it was that they collected all the available material concerning Joshua, the Judges, Samuel, Saul, David and the Kings, selecting and arranging the records from the new prophetic or "Deuteronomic" point of view, and compiling the first draft of what the Jews always called "The Former Prophets," namely the earlier historical Books of the Old Testament. The work thus begun by the scribes of Manasseh's reign was continued by their successors for many generations right up to the days of the Exile in Babylon—until, in fact, the Deuteronomic schools became merged, under the influence of Ezekiel, with colleges of a more definitely priestly character.

From the point of view of the purely scientific historian it must be admitted that in one direction the labours of the Deuteronomic scribes could well have been spared. No student can approach the earlier historical books of the Old Testament without being struck by the frequency of statements in the commentaries that such and such a verse or part of a verse is "clearly a D insertion," or "has evidently been worked over by the D revisers," the implication being that the passage in question is not to be trusted as an impartial record of actual fact. An excellent example of this can be seen in Garstang's¹ reconstruction of the Joshua-Judges period, where, although he attaches some importance to the traditions preserved by D, yet for an accurate picture of the true course of the conquest and settlement he relies almost solely upon the JE portions of the narrative. The "D insertions" are often no more than the pious annotations of a later age,

¹ J. Garstang: *Joshua-Judges* (1931).

written by a prophet-scribe who looked back upon the past through the spectacles of a more enlightened understanding of the Divine purpose in human affairs. It is necessary, therefore, to remind the reader once more that the Old Testament is not to be studied merely or chiefly from the point of view of cold scientific history, but rather as a great spiritual epic of the soul's adventures in search of God. As such, without the "interpolations" and "glosses" of the Deuteronomic school, the Old Testament would be lopped and mutilated indeed.

It must not be supposed, however, that all this additional matter was merely the invention of seventh or sixth century pietists, far from it. Many of the enactments of the Deuteronomic school are repeated from older parts of the Pentateuch, such as the Book of the Covenant, and nearly all of them are "unquestionably derived from pre-existent usage." That all of this pre-existent usage dates actually as far back as Moses would be too much to claim. But it was certainly recognized from the first as thoroughly Mosaic in spirit, and already invested with the sanction of immemorial antiquity.

THE DEUTERONOMIST HIMSELF

SUCH is the secret romance of the dark age of Manasseh. But we have yet to depict the most romantic figure of all, the great unknown and nameless prophet whom the scholars call *par excellence* "The Deuteronomist." Without the presumption of such an individual there is clearly something missing in our picture of those scattered

“monasteries” of scribes. How could a series of writings of such striking unity of purpose, style, historical and religious outlook be the product of divers groups of unrelated scribes? There is only one answer to this. Nothing but the direction of a master mind, some individual genius with a personality almost incredibly compelling, could have so co-ordinated the labours of those prophetic scribes as to produce the literary and spiritual unity evident in every line of the so-called Deuteronomic Revision. Nor is that all. The splendid originality of that Revision is as striking as its self-consistency. It is scarcely too much to say that if the religion of Israel entered the long dark tunnel of those seventy years as a sturdy youth, it emerged into the light at the other end as a man mature and immeasurably grown. Someone had been at work upon it in transit.

To the two well-known personalities whose work marked each an epoch in the religious development of Israel—Moses and Ezra—we must now add a third, for the influence of the Deuteronomist proved no less epoch-making. His signature is clear on every page of the earlier historical books of the Old Testament; his characteristic viewpoint dominates the whole and colours all that is best in Judaism even up to the Sermon on the Mount; to this day Biblical scholarship takes as its starting-point the tremendous renaissance of the Jewish Church which his labours set on foot. Among the greatest, therefore, of Israel’s religious leaders we have to number one whose name is quite unknown, of whom not even the tradition of a personal existence has survived, and whose epoch-making work remained entirely un-

recognized until in the nineteenth century scholars began to ask exactly how and when and by whom the wonderful edifice of the Old Testament had been designed.

If the first object of art is to conceal art, the Deuteronomist must have been an artist of the greatest. So "fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth" is the body of the Pentateuch that for centuries no one, in a world of eager Bible students, detected the fact of composite authorship which modern research has established now beyond the shadow of a doubt. Apparently it was not suspected even in those far-off days when the Pentateuch was received by the Jewish rabbis as the Five Books of Moses (although in Hebrew the preposition "of" as here used might better, perhaps, be translated "about" or "appertaining to"). At first sight it might seem inconceivable that so great a personality as that of the Deuteronomist should have been so utterly forgotten, but nothing is more remarkable in the Hebrew Scriptures than their habit of omitting much that to our minds is supremely interesting and important. In particular the Jewish temperament seems to have been completely uninterested in questions of authorship. So long as the books were there to be read, so long as their teaching was good and true, what did it matter who wrote them? There was an almost perfect absence both of the writer's vanity and the reader's curiosity. The great majority of the writings of the Old Testament are as anonymous as the Gospels of the New, the authors' names at present appended to them being nearly always the pious conjectures of a later age, scarcely more

indicative of authorship than the dedications of our parish churches.

It is difficult for us, with our exaggerated interest in personalities, to understand the working of the Jewish mind in this respect, and few discoveries have done more hurt to the modern Bible reader than that of Biblical anonymity or pseudonymity. When it was first suggested that the Pentateuch was not actually the work of Moses alone, but included the writings of many both before and after his time, many a man felt that much of its religious value had gone for good. In the same way, when it was found that the sermons of a great sixth-century prophet had been bound up within the volume of the eighth-century Isaiah, there were many who never picked up the book again. In other words, they quarrelled with the greatest collection of spiritual writings which the world has ever seen because of a trifling question of editorial technique. The student of such ancient literature as the Bible must acclimatize his mind to the atmosphere in which it was composed.

Of the Deuteronomist as a man we know nothing, but from the impress he has left upon the Scriptures we may guess a little. As far as the dates go, he may well have been a disciple of Isaiah or Micah or a member of some guild of prophets which flourished at the end of the reign of Hezekiah. But strangely enough, his affinities seem to have been rather with the prophets of the northern kingdom, with the Elohist scriptural tradition, with the outlook of Hosea. This can only mean one of two things: either that the prophetic schools of the north had continued

their active existence undismayed by the fall of Samaria, or else that the Deuteronomist had found his inspiration largely in their written works. The former is not impossible. Samaria had been rebuilt by the Assyrians, as we know from the inscriptions, and the Biblical narrative tells us that the imported colonists had from the first invited missionaries from Judah to come over and help them. It is not at all unlikely that many enterprising young prophets fled from the distressful domain of Manasseh to the comparative safety of the well-ordered Assyrian province, and there prepared the way for Josiah's subsequent intervention in the religious affairs of Beth-el. Can it be that from this northern sanctuary, still haunted by the memory of Amos and Hosea, the Deuteronomist directed and inspired the secret coteries of religious revolutionaries which a few years later were to expel the old regime from Jerusalem with almost Bolshevik finality and speed?

That the Deuteronomist was in the true succession of the greater prophets is abundantly proved by his work. In the first place he saturated himself and his followers through and through with their teaching, dwelling upon all that was best in each of them, and welding the whole into a Divine amalgam of learning and wisdom. Next, he tested the events of history by this inspired standard, and exemplified by practical application in details the truth of the prophetic theory.

But, thirdly, he allowed his vision to roam beyond the furthest horizons yet seen by the prophets of old, and had the amazing courage to add something which was original to the point of iconoclasm, something which dared to go beyond

anything yet whispered in the conclaves of prophet or of priest. It was a new doctrine, a doctrine which would be recognized at once as convicting of spiritual backwardness even the patriarchs of Israel themselves, yet one which had only to be fearlessly propounded to be straightway accepted as the very essence of true Judaism. This was the epoch-making doctrine of the One Sanctuary.

The great Israelites of the past had sacrificed to Jehovah at any wayside shrine and permitted themselves the use of many sacred objects such as pillars, poles, and images. Even after Solomon had built his magnificent Temple in the Holy City, and after the splendid rivalry of the Golden Bulls had centralized worship in the northern kingdom, the "high places" and the patriarchal objects of devotion had called forth no denunciation from the earlier prophets. Amos had criticized not the methods but the sincerity of the devotees. Hosea had gone a step further in denouncing the use of the ill-omened Golden Calves. Isaiah and Micah had persuaded Hezekiah to abandon the use of any image whatever. But it was left to the Deuteronomist to whip the slow chariot of Israel to a gallop and drive it to its obvious destination. In a blinding flash of prevision he saw at once that the One God must be worshipped at One Shrine, and one alone.

As long as the countryside was dotted with little local altars, each served by its isolated family of local priests, so long would the worship of Jehovah be in danger of contamination from the obstinate germs of rustic nature-religions, so long would the horrid spectre of Baal-worship mas-

querade under the guise of Jehovah-ism, and so long would the religion of Judaism remain an incoherent assemblage of undisciplined congregations. There was only one thing for it: the local sanctuaries, however sacred their associations, must go; henceforth there must be but one Temple, one altar, one priesthood, and one collection of sacred writings to whose authority all men alike should appeal on points of ritual and moral law.

And here the greatness of the Deuteronomist shows itself in its unique quality of becoming all things to all men. Had the work of reformation been attempted by a Hosea or a Jeremiah, it is probable that the new presentment of Judaism would have stripped the faith of every "outward and visible" or sacramental aid to worship. With the prophetic ideal of worshipping the Lord in spirit and in truth driven to its logical conclusion, both temple and altar and priesthood might have been entirely eliminated. On the other hand, if the temperament of an Ezra had prevailed at this crisis, there might have been little left of Judaism but a catalogue of rubrical directions for the conduct of the liturgy. And either would have been a terrible mistake. As it was, the Deuteronomist hit unerringly upon the golden mean. In his heart the fire of the prophet, in his head the wisdom of the world, he knew human nature too well to leave it without the ministry either of the Word or of the Sacraments. With him the uplifting of the spirit was everything, yet the uplifting of the hands was something too. To his insistent teaching of the love of God and of one's neighbour he added with little less emphasis directions as to ritual and one's duty to the priest. And all his

broad-minded tolerance and humanity never let him forget to hammer in the dogma of the One Only God, and the One Only Altar of the Lord.

In this spirit, then, the Deuteronomist reviews the history of Israel's past, pointing the moral of her successes and her misfortunes from the standpoint of her faithfulness or otherwise to Jehovah. From his eyrie on the pinnacle of the Temple he can now see quite clearly how the sin of idolatry has brought down punishment over and over again upon her head, and how on the contrary every motion of repentance has won pardon and reward. Retelling the old stories, he has interspersed them with reflections on these lines. Arriving at the history of more recent years, he frankly assesses the character of the kings in strict accordance with their attitude to the "high places" and the central shrine. Although he is too tactful to breathe the name, it is evident that the site of this shrine can be no other than the threshing-floor of Araunah in the city of Jerusalem, the centre of the world.

Whether he lived to see the day or not we cannot tell; but within a few years of Manasseh's death the ideals of the Deuteronomist were officially adopted by the Jewish king and his counsellors, and from that day even until now the regulation confining sacrifice and priesthood to the altar in Jerusalem, and in Jerusalem alone, has been observed among the Jews in all its strictness. It is nearly two thousand years now since the Jews last had access to their Temple, but patience is the badge of all their tribe, and they will wait another two thousand years rather than break the Deuteronomic Law. Not until the Mosque of

Omar is removed from Mount Moriah shall we see the family of Cohens or priests come into their own again and the savour of sweet-smelling incense mingle with the smoke of burnt sacrifice upon the ancient altar.

As to what we may call the editorial work of the Deuteronomist, the labours of Biblical scholars have enabled the ordinary reader to recognize his hand quite easily within the sacred text. Take up any good modern commentary, and you will find his paragraphs and sentences indicated by the Deuteronomist's monograph (D).

To give but one example: turn to 2 Kings 17¹⁰. Here the purely historical record extracted from the annals of Israel brings us up to the terrible climax of the fall of Samaria, captured and destroyed by Sargon of Assyria in 722 B.C. after an obstinate but unavailing resistance of three bitter years. The story itself is told in a curt verse or two, but the Deuteronomist cannot let it pass at that. At verse 7 he interpolates a long sermon driving home the lesson of the fall. *And it was so, because the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God.¹ . . . And they set them up pillars and Asherim upon every high hill, and under every green tree : and there they burnt incense in all the high places :² . . . and they rejected the statutes which the LORD had sent them by the hand of his servants the prophets.³ . . . Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight : there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.⁴* Thus over and over again the writer points the moral of Israel's disasters, and bids the

¹ 2 Kings 17⁷.

³ 2 Kings 17¹³.

² 2 Kings 17¹⁰.

⁴ 2 Kings 17¹⁸.

surviving kingdom of Judah listen to the voice of her prophets lest she too fall into the same condemnation.

THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

BUT the most amazing achievement of the Deuteronomist was his rewriting, in the same advanced prophetic spirit, of the story of the Pentateuch. It was a bold venture. By this time the tradition concerning the patriarchs and Moses had crystallized into a more or less "authorized version." The personality of the Great Lawgiver in particular towered head and shoulders above the rest. Every detail of the deliverance from Egypt and the subsequent giving of the Law on Mount Sinai had been invested with the halo of romance and the sceptre of an unquestioned authority. But it was not enough for the Deuteronomist. Boldly claiming Moses as the greatest of the prophets of Israel, he claimed also the right of his successors among the prophets to retell the ancient story in the light of a fuller revelation.

The quintessence of the Deuteronomist's work is to be found in one of the most important yet least known of all the Books of the Old Testament, the *Book of Deuteronomy*. Here we have the well-known story of Moses, his life, his teaching, and his death, invested with the glamour of the distance-enchanted past, and reviewed from the bird's-eye vantage-point of the later prophets. As a whole the book bears definitely the impress of a single mind. The author has collected with one undeviating purpose the most significant facts of

Mosaic history and Mosaic Law, gathering them not only from the already written narratives of the Jehovistic and Elohist documents, but from the deeply embedded traditions of the past eight centuries.

But he goes further than that. Confidently claiming for himself the full insignia of the prophetic mantle, he has not hesitated to develop the implications of the teaching of Moses with a view to present-day conditions, and demands that his presentment of the Mosaic Law shall be unquestioningly accepted by latter-day Israel. In the person of the Deuteronomist God's promise to Moses had been fulfilled: *I will raise them up a prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.*¹ Henceforward the Law of God was to be regarded as codified for ever and authoritatively interpreted by the Book of Deuteronomy: *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*²

This is not the place to dwell at length upon the contents of the *Book of Deuteronomy*. A few notes must suffice. The most startling innovation was, of course, the requirement that in the future no sacrifice should be offered to the Lord save in the one central sanctuary *which the Lord shall choose to put his name there*. Thus at one stroke all the local altars with their rural priests were

¹ Deuteronomy 18¹⁸ (Acts 7³⁷).

² 4².

abolished, and the Temple in Jerusalem raised to the unique position which it has ever since occupied. For the rest, there are many regulations of a ceremonial, eugenic, and sanitary type which were largely re-enactments of traditional practice, and which are presented rather for the instruction of the laity than of the technical expert.

But the most impressive feature of the Book is the spirit in which it is composed, the silver stream of an almost Christ-like loving-kindness which winds in and out among the laws and irrigates the whole. The source of this stream is the Love of God: *Thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.*¹ Conversely, every line breathes gratitude for the love which God has ever shown His people: *The LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all peoples that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all peoples: but because the LORD loveth you.*² Hosea's Pisgah view of the loving-kindness of God has become a clear and steady vision.

Arising out of this love, the perfect law of loving one's neighbour is laid down in terms which almost anticipate the Sermon on the Mount. *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt surely open thine hand unto him. . . . Thou shalt surely give him, and thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him.*³ The last injunction is typical—it is not so much the deed as the spirit behind it which matters. Moreover, the word

¹ 6⁵ (Matt. 22³⁷ etc.).

² 7⁶.

³ 15^{7, 10}.

"brother" is to be understood in no narrow sense: it covers more than merely fellow-Jews: *Thou shalt not abhor an Edomite; for he is thy brother.*¹ Nay, the duty of love extends even beyond the ties of blood brotherhood: *Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*² The unfortunate, the fatherless, and the widow are constantly remembered. Even dumb animals must be treated with consideration: the sheep which is lost must be succoured,³ the bird sitting on its nest spared,⁴ the ox wearily plodding round and round the mill-wheel indulged: *Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn.*⁵

There is, in fact, a humane note in many of the enactments which is very modern: guard-rails must be placed round dangerous buildings;⁶ in the day of battle the enemy's fruit trees are to be spared;⁷ slavery is made less oppressive. A notable moral advance was made in the complete prohibition of the blood-feud, and the limitation of responsibility for offences to the individual who commits them: *The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers.*⁸

The same humanitarian principles obtain even in time of war. It is true that when fighting against the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, the children of Israel are bidden to *save alive nothing that breatheth,*⁹ but this is merely a gesture to the memory of Joshua. Those nations had long since ceased to exist, and had vanished from practical politics.

¹ 23⁷.² 10¹⁹.³ 22¹.⁴ 22⁶.⁵ 25⁴.⁶ 22⁸.⁷ 20¹⁹.⁸ 24¹⁶.⁹ 20¹⁶.

But when it is a case of war with actual living enemies, then *the women, and the little ones, and the cattle* shall be spared.¹

The status of women is greatly raised, and from the publication of *Deuteronomy* probably dates (though it is not explicitly mentioned) the abandonment of polygamy among the Jews.

In the *Book of Deuteronomy*, then, we have one of the most amazing productions of human genius which the world has ever seen. Its writer was that rarest of types, the prophet with a practical turn of mind, his head in the clouds but his feet firmly planted on the earth, at once a visionary and a realist, and to cap it all a literary artist of consummate craftsmanship.

After reading the works of the Deuteronomist, one feels, as after reading Shakespeare's plays, it is strange that so little or nothing is known of their author. But there it must be left. How he lived or died we shall probably never know. His vivid description of an enemy attack and siege by *a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand; a nation of fierce countenance*,² with all its attendant horrors, sounds very much like an eyewitness's account of the fall of Samaria, and there are other indications to suggest that he may have been present at the time. But whether he lived long enough to see his ideals carried into effect at the Deuteronomic reformation, we cannot even guess.

Nor is it easy to understand what happened to his chief work, the *Book of Deuteronomy*, between the time of its writing and the epoch-making event of its final discovery in the Temple.

¹ 20¹⁴.

² 28⁴⁹.

The long night of Manasseh's reign of terror—it lasted over fifty years—receives scant notice either in the Bible or the inscriptions. Interference from Assyria there was none, for he continued his punctual payment of tribute, and Nineveh had her eyes on bigger game. Sennacherib was assassinated, as prophesied by Isaiah, in 680 B.C. His successor, Esar-haddon, made an invasion of Egypt, which the "great and noble Osnapper," or Ashurbanipal, was eager to follow up when he ascended the throne in 668 B.C. The writer of *Chronicles* preserves a tradition that Manasseh visited Babylon, now an Assyrian show-city, and the inscriptions support the possibility of its truth. But we know no more.

Manasseh died in 641 B.C. and was succeeded by his son Amon, named after an Egyptian deity evidently in recognition of the rising star of the Pharaohs. For during the reign of Ashurbanipal Assyria began suddenly and very swiftly to decline, and Egypt under Psammetichus at once threw off her shackles. But Amon was apparently no better than his father, and the prophets of Israel—the true prophets, that is, for there was never any lack of false ones—dared not yet emerge from their concealment.

With the accession of Josiah—significantly named after Jehovah—prospects began to look brighter. The young king obviously inclined to a purer form of worship in the Temple, and frowned as much as he dared upon the imported superstitions in which his forbears had delighted. But a dozen years were still to pass before the voice of prophecy, so long muzzled, became articulate again.

About the year 626 B.C., however, a new portent appeared upon the northern horizon which filled every heart with fear, and stirred the national conscience as it had not been stirred since Sennacherib "came down like a wolf on the fold" of Judah over seventy years earlier. Suddenly from the unknown mountains of the north broke loose upon the decaying empire of Assyria a terrible avalanche of barbarous humanity which carried everything before it. The Scythian invasion, as we now call it, helped to undermine the last defences of Nineveh, and rushed like a tidal bore towards Egypt, apparently about to engulf Palestine on its way. Then it was that the call came to the young prophet Jeremiah to save his country from the wrath of God by a summons to repentance. In a little while he was joined by another prophet, Zephaniah, and before long the mighty army of true prophets had once more been mobilized in defence of the majesty of their Lord. The Scythian invasion passed unexpectedly on its way without damaging Judah, but the lesson of that fearful crisis was not soon forgotten, and at last it seemed that the time was ripe for the full materialization of the Deuteronomist ideals.

A few years after the call of Jeremiah, in 621 B.C. to be exact, a discovery was made during certain repairs to the Temple in Jerusalem which was to give an irresistible impetus to the new spirit of reform. When Shaphan, the royal secretary or "scribe," came to the Temple to superintend the finances of the restoration, he found the High Priest, Hilkiah by name, in a great state of excitement. It seems he "had found the *Book of the Law* in the House of the Lord." He handed the book

to Shaphan, and the secretary reading it was so impressed that he read it to King Josiah. Whatever was in that book, so powerful was its immediate effect upon the young sovereign that he rent his clothes in conscience-stricken anguish, and sent a deputation of his chief advisers to the nearest representative of the prophetic order then available, in order to enquire what he should do to satisfy the Lord. Thus it happened that the honour of actually setting on foot one of the greatest religious revivals in history fell to a woman, for the prophetess Huldah, wife of one of the court officials, lived quite close to the palace, and to her came the royal envoys with their precious burden.

Huldah seems to have been the one person to whom the finding and the contents of the newly discovered book occasioned no surprise. She was ready at once with her advice, and it was in perfect accord with that of the manuscript in Shaphan's hands. One is tempted to conjecture that she knew more about the concealment of the book within the Temple than was ever confessed, and that it may even have been a hint from the prophetess which put Hilkiah on its track at the crucial moment.

However that may be, the effect of her advice was an emergency meeting of the Sanhedrin, followed by a public gathering of all the people of Jerusalem both small and great within the Temple precincts. Here, the king sitting in state in his royal stall by the pillar with his councillors around him, the book was read aloud to the assembly. One can imagine the effect, in those days when every line of written word was a rarity

and a marvellous thing, especially when there had been so long a famine of the word of the Lord, as the familiar story of Moses in all its grandeur but with a new grace was unfolded before the attentive people. One can see their downcast eyes as the full realization of their betrayal of the past dawned upon them, or their covert glances towards the king when the finger, as it were, of the Great Lawgiver swung round and pointed towards the royal stall. *Thou shalt in any wise set him king over thee, whom the LORD thy God shall choose, . . . and this law . . . shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them.*¹

As the evening shadows of that long day fell, and the tale unwound itself to its wistful end on the summit of Mount Pisgah, suddenly the king stood up by his pillar in full view of all the people, and in a great voice made a covenant with the Lord. On his own behalf and on that of his subjects he promised *with all his heart, and all his soul, to confirm the words of this covenant that were written in this book.*² The reformation so long prophesied had begun.

The identity of this soul-stirring book will already have been guessed, and the unanimous conviction of Biblical scholars with scarcely a dissentient voice confirms the guess that this Book of the Law was indeed none other than the *Book of Deuteronomy*, essentially identical with the last book of the Pentateuch as we have it to-day. The whole course of Josiah's reformation and of subsequent religious developments bears the un-

¹ 17¹⁵.

² 2 Kings 23³.

doubted impress of the Laws of Moses as interpreted by the Deuteronomist. The seed sown in secret in the dark ages of Manasseh and Amon had at last borne fruit an hundredfold.

The details of the reformation need not detain us. The cult of foreign deities and everything savouring of idolatry was put down, together with the immoralities associated therewith. The valley of Topheth was defiled, and every local sanctuary deprived of its altar of sacrifice, although, in the humane spirit of Deuteronomy, some provision was made for the dispossessed priests. The long arm of Josiah extended, as we have already seen, even beyond his own dominion and into the Samaritan province of the now decaying Assyrian power, the ancient altar of Jeroboam at Beth-el not escaping destruction. Henceforward the Temple in Jerusalem was to be the only place of sacrifice to the Lord. And the reform was signed and sealed, as it were, by a celebration of the Feast of the Passover which eclipsed all that had ever been known before.

The soul of the Deuteronomist, looking down from his resting-place in Abraham's bosom, may well have breathed a sigh of thankfulness and relief.

Nor did the influence of this great mind cease with the reforms of Josiah. The Deuteronomic schools continued their activity, venturing even to add to the master's hand. And similar schools of pious scribes, writing from a more definitely priestly point of view, filled up the gaps in ceremonial directions which the Deuteronomist, in the absence of actual experience of the single sanctuary in practice, had necessarily left.

Perhaps the earliest work of such priestly successors of the Deuteronomist is to be found in the so-called *Law of Holiness*, now incorporated within the *Book of Leviticus* (chaps. 17-26). The title of this section is due to its constant insistence upon the awful holiness of God, and the need that His people should be holy too. *Ye shall be holy ; for I the LORD your God am holy.*¹ Faithful to the ideals of the great prophets of the eighth century, and not less courageous than the Deuteronomist in innovating where new conditions seemed to demand new methods, the priestly writer of the Holiness Code made a considerable advance in the development of the doctrine of the Priesthood and the rubrics of sacrifice in the Temple at Jerusalem. That Temple was now universally recognized as the only true shrine of Jehovah in all the world, and it was obvious that the older ordinances could no longer suffice. The regulations of *Deuteronomy* in this respect are, therefore, considerably tightened up, and prepare the way for the final processes of elaboration which we shall find first in Ezekiel, and then in the completed Priestly Code of Ezra.

The Law of Holiness contains a curious and to modern eyes somewhat incongruous admixture of moral laws and ceremonial regulations, each of them intended to promote the holiness of the nation in its dealings with God and man. Thus the golden rule, *The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself,*² is followed almost immediately by the injunction to stone

¹ Leviticus 19².

² Leviticus 19³⁴.

an offender to death;¹ and a large part of the code is devoted to minute rubrical directions concerning ceremonial cleanliness and the ritual of worship. The truth is that, though the writer was profoundly influenced by the ethical and humane spirit of Deuteronomy, yet he saw very little distinction between practical morality and the performance of ritual acts. They were both "doing good," the one to man, the other to his Maker, and both were inextricably bound up with one another. The typical spirit of Judaism, in fact, was sacramentalist beyond what we can easily understand, and we must first put ourselves in the place of those ancient experimenters in religion before we can appreciate their insistence on a multiplicity of "outward and visible signs" as a necessary means of every kind of grace.

That such an exaggerated attachment to ceremonial and ritual had its dangers is very obvious, and by the time of Christ it had indeed attained an importance so stifling to the spirit of true religion that our Lord denounced it again and again. But there is no doubt that in its time and place the Law of Holiness, together with its subsequent developments in Ezekiel (whom it greatly influenced) and the Priestly Code, did most opportunely lift the faith of Israel to a higher plain and stamp upon it for ever the impression of pure monotheism.

¹ Leviticus 20²,

CHRONOLOGICAL CHART

THE DEUTERONOMIST

B.C.

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696. Death of Hezekiah.
MANASSEH, King of Judah.
? Martyrdom of Isaiah.
690. ? Martyrdom of Micah.
Beginning of long Prophetic Silence.
Work of the Deuteronomist begins.
680. Death of Sennacherib.
Esarhaddon now King of Assyria.
678. Manasseh tributary to Assyria.
Esarhaddon rebuilds Babylon.
Babylon visited by Manasseh.
Esarhaddon takes Memphis.
668. Ashurbanipal now King of Assyria.
Assyrians overwhelm Egypt.
650. Decline of Assyria begins.
? Manasseh fortifies Jerusalem (2 *Chronicles* 33¹⁴).
? Birth of Jeremiah and Zephaniah.
641. Death of Manasseh.
641. AMON, King of Judah.
Revival of Egypt under Psammetichus I.
639. Assassination of Amon.
639. JOSIAH, King of Judah.
627. Death of Ashurbanipal.
626. Menace of Scythian Invasion.
Call of Jeremiah and Zephaniah.
The long Prophetic Silence broken.
621. Discovery of "Book of the Law" in the Temple.
The Deuteronomic Reformation.
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CHAPTER V

JEREMIAH (A), ZEPHANIAH, AND NAHUM

THE personal history of Jeremiah is better known to us than that of any other prophet of the Old Testament, owing to the devoted labours of his friend and disciple, Baruch the scribe, who kept a written record of his master's utterances and frequently interspersed them with biographical notes of his own. Yet even so our knowledge of the first half of Jeremiah's life is very slight, while the faulty text and disarrangement of his earlier prophecies are a notorious difficulty to Bible students. The blame for this must be laid chiefly at the door of King Jehoiakim, who deliberately destroyed the original manuscript of these prophecies, so that Baruch had to write it all over again from memory as best he could while still in hiding as a fugitive. It is this obscure period of the prophet's life which we endeavour to reconstruct in the present chapter.

Jeremiah, then, was born towards the end, probably, of the long reign of Manasseh the Bad, about 560 B.C. By this time the royal persecution had done its work, and a whole generation had passed since the true prophets of Jehovah had been permitted to lift up their voice in Judah. None but the aged could boast of having seen the famous Micah or Isaiah with their own eyes. Nevertheless, as is shown in our chapter on the Deutero-

nostic era,¹ the fires of prophecy were never entirely extinguished; and through the secret teaching of the Deuteronomic schools it is probable that a youth of such antecedents as Jeremiah would be familiar from his earliest years with the work and with the spirit of the great eighth-century prophets. He would also be well acquainted with the ancient versions of the Scriptures which they used, especially with the now combined J and E documents of the Pentateuch.

For he was brought up in the historic village of Anathoth, not more than three or four miles from the Holy City, overlooking the Dead Sea. Here it was that David's faithful friend and priest, Abiathar, had resided after his deposition by Solomon; and it may well have been Abiathar's descendants who ministered at the local shrine of Jehovah, even unto the days of Hilkiah, priest of Anathoth, the father of Jeremiah.

Therefore we can assume that the young enthusiast who was to break the prophetic silence of seventy years was, like Hosea, from the first in touch with strong religious influences; and, like Hosea, he found much in that religious environment against which his whole soul rose in revolt. There is no prophet who has less use for the outward shows and ceremonies of worship than Jeremiah. Perhaps as boat-boy or thurifer at the sacrifices he had seen enough of them "to last him a lifetime," as the saying is. Nor is it altogether fanciful to suggest that his early training amongst the descendants of Abiathar at Anathoth, with their age-old antipathy for the rival Zadokite priesthood in Jerusalem, may have occasioned the somewhat

¹ See Chapter IV., *The Deuteronomist*.

lukewarm attitude which he exhibits towards the observances of the Temple, and even towards the Deuteronomic reforms.

Jeremiah could scarcely have remembered the dark days of Manasseh, for he was little more than a child when that evil monarch, full of years if not of honour, was laid to rest in his palace garden, relinquishing the throne of Jerusalem to his young son Amon. The change of sovereign, however, brought little change for the better, and foreign influence still dominated the court. By this time the reign of Ashurbanipal, which had begun so gloriously with the invasion of Egypt, was petering out to an unexpectedly dismal close. The once dreaded name of Nineveh was in eclipse. In spite of the Ethiopian Tirhakah's defeat and death, Psammetichus was actually turning the tables upon Assyria by invading her Palestinian possessions, and Nilotic influences had long been felt in the manners and religion of Judah. The name of the young king—Amon, or Amen—indicates clearly enough the Egyptian trend of his sympathies; and it may well have been an anti-Egyptian party in the palace which instigated his assassination in the second year of his reign. But even the death of Amon did not at once procure relief.

Jeremiah must have been about twelve years old when Josiah, a boy even younger than himself, ascended the throne. It is interesting to reflect on the early influences and upbringing which made Josiah the radical religious reformer he afterwards became. How was it that after more than seventy years of religious depravity, the son of such a one as Amon, the grandson of

Manasseh the Bad, should suddenly present Judah with the spectacle of a monarch who *did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left*¹? One would like to know more of that young queen-mother, Jedidah the Beloved, daughter of a certain Adaiah of Boscath, whose name proclaims his loyalty to Jehovah. One pictures Jedidah pleading with Amon that her new-born son should also be named after Jehovah, and insisting that the little Josiah should be brought up strictly in the faith of her fathers. At any rate it would seem that from the first the new king had leanings towards the ancient faith. He had also found good reason to trust the advice of his womenfolk: when the time came to strike his epoch-making blow for Jehovah, it was to a woman, Huldah the prophetess, that he instinctively turned for advice.

This, however, was many years later. During the first few years of his reign the boy king was naturally unable to stem the tide of idolatry and social unrighteousness which had set in so strongly during the reigns of his predecessors. We know little about this period, but we can surmise that gradually the ban on the prophets of Jehovah was removed, and that here and there voices were uplifted to stir the public conscience to a sense of sin. But such voices are apt to pass unregarded in times of material well-being, and an age that has no fears for its economic prosperity has usually little anxiety as to its spiritual state. For two generations the surface of Palestinian politics had been scarcely ruffled. With Assyria

¹ 2 Kings 22².

no longer exacting indemnities, and Egypt anxious to establish trade relations, business in Jerusalem was distinctly good, so why worry?

It needed a political crisis of the first magnitude to give the prophets their opportunity. And in 626 B.C. the crisis came. Far away in the mountains of the unexplored north, men had heard dimly from time to time of an incredibly barbarous people, regarded vaguely as the descendants of Japheth and known as the Gomer or Cimmerians. To-day we usually speak of them, after the classical example, as the Scythians. By the more imaginative Jews they were doubtless looked upon in much the same way as we used to speak of the Yellow Peril, or as the Romans looked upon the Vandals and the Goths—teeming hordes that might one day burst their natural barriers and overwhelm the civilized world.

The first sign that this human volcano had become active was given shortly after the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C. Traders from the far east reported that the lava-flow had penetrated as far as Nineveh itself, where it had been utilized cunningly enough for the protection of that city against a new enemy, King Cyaxares and his Medes. But such an eruption cannot be controlled for long. Soon every outlet in the distant Caucasus Mountains was vomiting its myriads of uncouth warriors, and it looked as though the whole of the Fertile Crescent from the Jordan to the Euphrates was to be submerged. As the rumours increased in urgency, it was realized with a shock of alarm such as had not been felt for two generations that the flow of this molten tide was taking a definitely south-easterly course, that its

ultimate objective was now veering not to Assyria but the richer prize of Egypt, and that Jerusalem lay directly in the way of its advance.

It was at this critical moment that the young acolyte of Anathoth received his prophetic call. *The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, . . . I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nations. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD ! behold, I cannot speak : for I am a child. But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child : for to whomsoever I shall send thee thou shalt go, and whatsoever I shall command thee thou shalt speak. . . . Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth ; and the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.*¹ From that moment Jeremiah also was among the prophets, ready to speak out as and when the Lord should command him.

To a luxury-loving and faithless generation, inclined to bury its head in the sand, Jeremiah described in words of terror which could not go unheard the prevision which he had all too clearly of the imminent eruption from the north. His first vision was significant of his whole message. He saw the image of a tree, but lately bleak and bare, now breaking forth into springtide blossom. *I said, I see a rod of an almond tree.*² The Hebrew word for "almond" is almost identical with that for "watch," and by one of those arresting puns so characteristic in the prophetic writings, the Lord replies, *Thou hast well seen : for I watch over my word to perform it.* Jeremiah's call is to usher in a springtime of righteousness after the winter of apostasy.

But first must come the cleansing fires of the

¹ I 4, 9.

² I 11.

Divine judgement on the sins of the past. Jeremiah now sees a second and more dreadful vision. *I see a seething caldron ; and the face thereof is from the north. Then the LORD said unto me, Out of the north evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land.*¹ It is the first premonition of the Scythian invasion, which the prophet sees as clearly as though it were already at the gate. *Their quiver is an open sepulchre, they are all mighty men. . . . They shall beat down thy fenced cities, wherein thou trustest, with the sword.*² Behold, a people cometh from the north country ; and a great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth. They lay hold on bow and spear ; they are cruel, and have no mercy ; their voice roareth like the sea, and they ride upon horses ; every one set in array, as a man to the battle, against thee, O daughter of Zion. . . . There is the sword of the enemy, and terror on every side.³

The edge of his prophecies was sharpened in a way that is scarcely apparent to the ordinary reader. We have to remind ourselves that in our English Bible we have only a translation, and that we must lose perforce much of the vigour, the cadence, the pungent assonances of the original Hebrew. It is true that in the English version we lose less than in any other, the genius of our language being particularly suited to the rendering of Biblical Hebrew, and indeed often adding a new beauty to the original. But one thing we miss almost entirely—the rhythmical, poetical form of the prophet's diction. For Jeremiah, like most of the other prophets, was a poet. "As a poet, in fact, he is surpassed in the Old Testament

1 1¹³.2 5¹⁶.3 6²².

only by Hosea, some of the Psalmists, and the poet of Job. Stirred to the depths of his passionate soul by the sin and by the inevitable doom of his country, he gave to his lyrics an intensity and a power which thrill us to this day. It is impossible to read without a sense of wild horror such a passage as the great chaos-vision (*I beheld the earth, and lo, it was waste and void, etc.*),¹ which we may, albeit feebly, paraphrase somewhat thus:

*I looked on the earth—
And I saw chaos' rude birth,
At the heavens—and from them no light brake;
I looked on the hills—
In their agony thrills
All the mountains did totter and quake.
I looked o'er the ground—
No man there I found,
All the birds had winged far their flight;
Unto Carmel I faced—
And its gardens were waste,
All was blasted beneath the fell blight."*²

Such was the terrible forecast of impending doom with which the young and unknown prophet captured the ears of his fellow-countrymen: and, with the northern hordes knocking at the gate, no one could deny that his prophecy seemed only too likely to be fulfilled.

Fear struck cold on every heart. But why, they asked plaintively, should Jehovah allow His

¹ 4²³.

² We are indebted for this quotation to W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson's *Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (1934), which the reader might well consult.

chosen people to suffer like this? The answer of the prophet was fearless and uncompromising. It was because Judah had sinned against her Lord. In the accents of Amos he denounced the social evils of Jerusalem: *Among my people are found wicked men: they watch, as fowlers lie in wait; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit: therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass in deeds of wickedness: they plead not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they should prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge. Shall I not visit for these things? saith the LORD: shall not my soul be avenged on such a nation as this?*¹

Particularly scathing is his denunciation of the rampant idolatry of the day. Almost in the very selfsame phrases as Hosea, he cries out on Israel's harlotry and ingratitude. *They have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.*² . . . *Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.*³ All kinds of foreign deities, Egyptian, Assyrian, and the rest, have been allowed entrance into the Holy City; the foul superstition of Baal-worship is creeping back; even among such as still profess loyalty to Jehovah religion goes no deeper than the offering of elaborate but meaningless sacrifices. *To what purpose cometh there to me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? Your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing unto me.*⁴ Nor is one class of the people

¹ 5²⁶.² 1¹⁶.³ 3²⁰.⁴ 6²⁰.

more to be blamed than another: all alike are in the same condemnation, rich and poor, lowly and great. *Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that doeth justly, that seeketh truth; and I will pardon her.*¹ . . . A wonderful and horrible thing is come to pass in the land; the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so.²

Over and over again we shall hear in the *Book of Jeremiah* of these false prophets, priests, and scribes. *The priests said not, Where is the LORD? and they that handle the law knew me not: the rulers also transgressed against me, and the prophets prophesied by Baal, and walked after things that do not profit.*³ Taking the name of Jehovah in vain, they prophesy peace where there is no peace, gloss over the sins of unfaithfulness with a specious veneer of broad-mindedness, tolerate the insincere priests, and do their best to silence any true prophet of the Lord who should dare to lift up his voice. *Your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion.*⁴ To such, and to all who were so willingly deceived by them, the forthcoming invasion from the north was to come as a salutary reminder of the reality of God's wrath against sin. Since they would not hear the true prophets, then they must be made to hear in another way. *I set watchmen over you, saying, Harken to the sound of the trumpet; but they said, We will not hearken. Therefore hear, ye nations, and know, O congregation. . . . Behold, I will bring evil upon this people, even the fruit of*

¹ 5¹.² 5³⁰.³ 2⁸.⁴ 2³⁰.

*their thoughts, because they have not hearkened unto my words.*¹

Jeremiah has been called the "gloomy prophet," and his name is almost synonymous with pessimism. This is not fair to him. True, he foretold too often a future full of darkness and misery for his people, but he foretold no more than the actual facts, and always there was a "silver lining" to the clouds. God's chastisement was that of a loving father, inflicted not in anger but in pity, that so He might purge Israel of her sins and recall her to Himself. It is precisely the view of Hosea, that of the all-forgiving God of Love. *They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? . . . Thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return unto me, saith the LORD.*² Far from a pessimist, he confidently hoped even for the restoration of Israel, the northern kingdom, to the divine favour. *Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; I will not look in anger upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, I will not keep anger for ever.*³ . . . *And there is hope for thy latter end, saith the LORD; and thy children shall come again to their own border.*⁴ The prophet who first welcomed the possibility of Ephraim's restoration was no pessimist. Rather say of Jeremiah that he saw the worst, but foresaw the best.

Through all this troublous time, the young prophet matched his words with symbolic deeds, as was the time-honoured practice of the profession. We shall see many instances of this as we

¹ 6¹⁷.² 3¹.³ 3¹².⁴ 31¹⁷.

go along. In the meantime, dearly though he appreciated human fellowship, he remained unmarried. *The word of the LORD came also unto me, saying, Thou shalt not take thee a wife, neither shalt thou have sons or daughters in this place.*¹ He refused to participate in any of the usual social gatherings, either of mourning or of rejoicing. *I sat not in the assembly of them that make merry, nor rejoiced: I sat alone because of thy hand; for thou hast filled me with indignation.*² He dedicated himself, in fact, then and throughout his life, to the single-minded service of Jehovah in the vocation of prophet. And so, for a moment, we will leave him, preaching among the hills of Benjamin and Judah the great summons to repentance which was even then preparing the way for the wonderful reformation of Josiah five years hence.

ZEPHANIAH

JEREMIAH was not the only prophet whom the Scythian eruption had thrown up. For in the same year that the call came to the young neophyte of Anathoth, the word of the Lord came also to Zephaniah *the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah.*³ In the very unusual particularity of this genealogical tree, carrying back his ancestry to the fourth generation, we realize that in the prophet Zephaniah we have an aristocrat, actually descended from princes of the blood royal, and a great-great-grandson of good King Hezekiah himself. For the rest, we know nothing whatever of his personality save

¹ 16¹.

² 15¹⁷.

³ Zephaniah 1¹.

what can be gathered from the very short Book which bears his name.

As in the case of Jeremiah, the occasion of Zephaniah's call was the Scythian invasion then threatening from the Caucasus mountains the destruction of the whole of the ancient east. But as one would expect from a prophet in close touch with the court and its advisers, his vision reaches a wider political horizon than that of his contemporary. Not Judah alone, but every nation of Asia was in direst peril. Philistia, Moab, Ammon, even distant Ethiopia shall be slain by the sword of the invader. Long afterwards, when the prophecy had been only too literally fulfilled, it was remembered how he had foreseen the doom of the Mistress of the East herself. *He will stretch out his hand against the north, and destroy Assyria ; and will make Nineveh a desolation, and dry like the wilderness. And herds shall lie down in the midst of her, all the beasts of the nations : both the pelican and the porcupine shall lodge in the chapiters thereof : their voice shall sing in the windows ; desolation shall be in the thresholds. . . . This is the joyous city that dwelt carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none else beside me : how is she become a desolation, a place for beasts to lie down in ! every one that passeth by her shall hiss, and wag his hand.*¹

This forecast was not fulfilled quite in the way that Zephaniah expected, for Nineveh survived the Scythian irruption: but thirteen years later the bloody city did indeed fall a prey to the conquering Babylonian, as we shall see, and from that day to this has remained a desolation.

For the rest, the message of Zephaniah is largely that of his greater contemporary, and, like Jeremiah, he re-echoes the teaching of the eighth-century prophets. He is a true successor of Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah in his denunciation of foreign superstitions, his attack upon social wrongs, his repudiation of false prophets and priests, and his view of national misfortune as the direct punishment of God on sinners. He foresees the Scythian invasion as a Divine visitation, a Day of Judgement. From Zephaniah we get the famous phrase the Dies Iræ, or Day of Wrath. *The great day of the LORD is near, it is near and hasteth greatly. . . . That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm.*¹ . . . *Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD'S wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy.*²

No nation on earth shall escape the Lord's wrath on that day, but Jerusalem least of all, for *She obeyed not the voice; she received not correction; she trusted not in the LORD; she drew not near to her God.*³ . . . *Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have profaned the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.*⁴ Yet there is an extraordinary breadth of vision and deep hopefulness of the ultimate future which is far in advance of his times. The Day of Wrath is but the harbinger of a Day of Mercy, when the Lord shall bring not only Jerusalem but all the world of men to a knowledge of His truth. Sing,

¹ I 14.² I 18.³ 3¹.⁴ 3⁴.

O daughter of Zion ; shout, O Israel ; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. . . . The king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee : thou shalt not fear evil any more. In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not : O Zion, let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God is in the midst of thee, a mighty one who will save : he will rejoice over thee with joy, he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.¹ And the whole world shall rejoice with Zion, For then will I turn to the peoples a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent² . . . and I will make them a praise and a name, whose shame hath been in all the earth.³

What, in those dark days, was the secret of Zephaniah's optimism ? We can only guess. It may be that living as he did in Jerusalem and being of the blood royal, he was privileged to enjoy the confidence of King Josiah and of the queen-mother Jedidah. The prophetess Huldah, too, and doubtless many others of the same bent of mind would be in the circle of his friends. If that is so, then Zephaniah must assuredly have smelled the fragrance of the first spring breezes that heralded the coming reformation, and his heart would be filled with hope. Whether he knew of the precise direction this reformation would take, or was aware of the massive foundations already laid by the Deuteronomist and his school, is a matter of opinion. The extract from his prophecies which has come down to us is too short to reveal how much he knew, or how much he did not know. One thing is certain: if he

¹ 3¹⁴.² 3⁹.³ 3¹⁹

lived to see the discovery of the Book of the Law in the Temple of Jerusalem, he must have been thoroughly in sympathy with its point of view. Like Jeremiah, knowingly or not, he helped to prepare the way.

We have now brought the history of the times up to the eve of the threatened Scythian invasion, with Jeremiah and Zephaniah painting the most awe-inspiring pictures of imminent catastrophe.

Of what happened next we are in almost complete darkness. It is as though a page were missing from the historical records. Under the dates from 625 B.C. to 621 B.C. neither historian nor prophet has left any record in the Scriptures. Apparently 'the blood-red sunrise of the Day of Wrath never came, at least not at that period and not in the land of Judah. The Scythian tidal-wave was diverted at the eleventh hour into no more than a narrow mill-race spreading along the maritime plain towards the Nile delta, where the Pharaoh Psammetichus seems to have had little difficulty in stemming its progress. The dreaded barbarians disappeared as quickly as they came, and henceforward we hear of them no more.

At first sight, and with our limited knowledge, it would seem that the forecasts of Jeremiah and Zephaniah were not fulfilled, and that their credit must accordingly have suffered much at the hands of the jubilant false prophets who had pooh-poohed the northern menace from the first. That Zephaniah should never have lifted up his voice again, that Jeremiah should have fallen silent for many long years, and that neither should have been consulted at the time of the Deuteronomic reforms, certainly seem to support this view.

But the argument from silence is precarious even though multiplied by three, and in the case of the Hebrew Scriptures is notoriously unreliable. The fact that these early prophecies of Jeremiah and the little *Book of Zephaniah* have been preserved without question among the sacred books of Israel is a tangible piece of evidence in an opposite direction: as is the unhesitating acceptance of Jeremiah's prophetic inspiration at a later date. Possibly the missing page contained an account somewhat similar to that of Sennacherib's providential repulse from Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah, an account of a peril vividly foreseen but miraculously averted by some change of heart and in answer to prayer. After all, the religion of a whole people cannot be reformed by the mere fiat of a king, and it is reasonable to suppose that some very real shock and some very trusted leadership must have done the spade-work for Josiah's sowing of the seed.

THE DEUTERONOMIC REFORMS

HOWEVER that may be, the curtain lifts again in the eighteenth year of King Josiah (621 B.C.), when the *Book of Deuteronomy* was mysteriously discovered by Hilkiah in the Temple, and the epoch-making assembly was summoned which henceforth transformed the religious ideals of Israel. At one blow the foreign idols were banished, immorality hiding under the guise of religion sternly repressed, and the worship of Jehovah immeasurably spiritualized by the limitation of sacrifice to the central shrine in Jerusalem. To such a movement, although it may not have

gone as far as he wished, Jeremiah could not fail to be sympathetic. And when next he lifts up his voice in prophecy, it is to exhort the people to abide loyally by the terms of the Deuteronomic covenant. *The LORD said unto me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, Hear ye the words of this covenant, and do them.*¹ The obligation of Sabbath observance is especially insisted upon: *to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but to hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein. . . . But if ye will not hearken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.*²

The concentration of sacrifice at the central sanctuary in Jerusalem, though it involved the abandonment of his family shrine at Anathoth, receives his full approval. *A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. O LORD, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed.*³ Indeed it was probably this very acceptance of the law of the central sanctuary which earned that inveterate hostility of his fellow-townsmen which dogged him all his life. It was Jeremiah's misfortune to be regarded on more than one occasion as a traitor to his friends. At any rate we are told many times that the young men of Anathoth sought his life, saying, *Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah. . . . Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.*⁴ It is in connection with this persecution

¹ II⁶.² I7²⁴.³ I7¹².⁴ I8¹⁸.

that we first hear the well-known phrase, *I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter*,¹ and there are many indications that the sufferings of Jeremiah were in the mind of the Second Isaiah when, a century later, he portrayed the character of the Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief.

Nevertheless it is undeniable that Jeremiah had very little to say, so far as we know, about the reforms of Josiah. Indeed, for the rest of that reign, a period of over fifteen years, from 621 B.C. to 607 B.C., he had nothing to say at all. This silence is one of the enigmas of prophetic history. Maybe it was a compliment to King Josiah and his reformation that Jeremiah found it unnecessary to prophesy. He declares himself, at a later period, that he looked on Josiah as a ruler whose heart was right with God and man. Addressing Jehoahaz, he asks, *Did not thy father (Josiah) eat and drink, and do judgement and justice? then it was well with him. He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Was not this to know me? saith the LORD.*² And he draws a strong contrast between the happy days of Josiah's reign in Jerusalem and the evil times upon which she had fallen in the reign of his son. Nevertheless, it is difficult to explain the silence of those fifteen years, even when one remembers that it was a silence in which all the other prophets shared, a kind of prophetic moratorium, in fact, so far as Judah was concerned.

¹ II 19 (cf. Isaiah 53 7).

² 22 15.

NAHUM

ONLY one prophet of that period has survived, and his prophecy is devoted to a single theme—the fall of Israel's ancient enemy Nineveh. Of the personality of Nahum we know nothing at all save what we are told in the title-verse of his Book. It is *The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.*¹ A countryman like Amos, one would gather, of no particular family, and from a village of so little importance that no one to this day knows where it was; yet like Amos a writer of tremendous literary power. It is probably to this, and to the fact that he describes so vividly one of the truly epoch-making events of eastern history, that we owe the preservation of his short prophecy. Like the rest of the prophets, he has nothing whatever to say about the state of affairs in Judah during those silent fifteen years which succeeded the Deuteronomic reforms, save that she may now and for evermore feel free of the fear of Assyrian intervention. Disregarding all else, his Book is a shattering projectile shot straight at the heart of Nineveh, that bloody city, that ancient enemy, fallen at last a victim to the vengeance of the Lord. *Behold, upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! Keep thy feasts, O Judah, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee: he is utterly cut off.*²

It is strange to reflect that those beautiful words, so familiar to us in the Second Isaiah as a presage of the Prince of Peace,³ should first have

¹ I¹.² I¹⁵.³ Isaiah 52⁷.

been used in exultation over the downfall of an earthly foe. It is but one of a thousand reminders we shall encounter as we read the prophets, that the mind of God in all His loving-kindness was not revealed in a blinding moment, but gradually in an ever increasing light.

As a descriptive poem, Nahum's pæan over the destruction of Nineveh is superb. The final act of the drama had begun in 616 B.C., when Nabopolassar the new king of Babylon had joined forces with Cyaxares the Mede to effect her downfall, and the climax came (as the newly discovered cuneiform chronicles inform us) in 612 B.C., when Sinsharishkun, the last king of Nineveh, found the enemy within his gates. Nahum's picture of the ensuing ruin reads almost like that of an eye-witness. *Woe to the bloody city ! It is all full of lies and rapine ; the prey departeth not. The noise of the whip, and the noise of the rattling of wheels ; and pransing horses, and jumping chariots ; the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, and the glittering spear ; and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of carcases : and there is none end of the corpses ; they stumble upon their corpses. . . . Nineveh is laid waste : who will bemoan her ?*¹ It was the end of Nineveh. Two centuries later, when Xenophon with the remnant of his famous ten thousand passed the spot, all that survived of her ancient glory was a shapeless mound or two. And so it remained until the explorers of the nineteenth century excavated her foundations under the miserable huts of Kouyunyik.

Yet the fall of the capital did not at once complete the destruction of the Assyrian power. A

stand was made for some years at Carchemish, where strangely enough an ally was found in Nineveh's hereditary enemy, Egypt. We now know that when the Pharaoh Necho marched northwards towards Carchemish, it was not to attack but to assist and reinforce the Assyrian refugees against the upstart Babylonian. And had Necho persisted in his objective, it is possible that the whole course of ancient history might have been altered. Unfortunately for the struggling empire of Assyria, he allowed his march to be unconscionably delayed, and his attention to be diverted by something which happened on the way northward at Megiddo.

What King Josiah was doing at Megiddo we shall probably never know. It may be that he too was marching to the assistance of his nominal suzerain Assyria: or on the other hand he may have conceived some mad idea of conciliating the rising power of Babylon by an attempt to intercept the Pharaoh. Whatever the reason, Necho quarrelled with Josiah, and after a brief resistance slew him at Megiddo and sent his dead body back in his chariot to Jerusalem. Thus in 607 B.C. was cut short the life of one of the best kings that Judah ever knew.

THE REVIVAL OF CORRUPTION

THIS high-handed action destroyed at one blow the well-planned edifice of political independence and religious integrity so carefully built up by Josiah and his prophets in Jerusalem. For twenty happy years it had been possible to evade alike

the friendship and the opposition of any foreign power, and a high wall had been placed around the vineyard of the Lord over which the winds of alien superstition could not blow. But the catastrophe of Megiddo changed all that. To Judah it meant much more than merely the untimely death of a God-fearing king: it meant the end of an epoch. Henceforward, for weal or woe, the policy of non-intervention must be abandoned: Judah had once more become the "cock-pit of the East," and must choose her side, either with Egypt or with her great antagonist beyond the Euphrates.

For the moment it was only too clear where her choice must lie. Assyria was in her death-throes, Babylon still in the pangs of birth, while Egypt, mobilized for war, was at her very gates, still dawdling ominously in Northern Syria, waiting to see what action, if any, the Jews would take to avenge the slaughter of their king. The first step they took was naturally to appoint a successor to Josiah. For some reason or other Eliakim the heir-apparent was passed over, and the people insisted on the anointing of a younger son, Shallum or Jehoahaz. One can only suppose, from the subsequent course of events, that Jehoahaz owed his popularity largely to the fact that he was much more easy-going and "broad-minded" than his father with regard to morality and religion, for many of the rising generation were already chafing at the strait-laced Deuteronomic regime. Also his defiant attitude towards Egypt appealed to the more hot-blooded of his murdered father's adherents.

Jehoahaz at all events had not been long upon

the throne before it became manifest that he intended to encourage the retrogressive element in Jerusalem. The young monarch openly derided the principles of Josiah's reformation, and bade fair to destroy in a moment the work of years. The prophets awoke with a start to find the world toppling about their ears: the long moratorium was at an end. In the words of Jeremiah, *A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they are gone after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers.*¹

Even yet one can scarcely feel that Jeremiah's real life-work as a prophet has begun. Until now his appearances in that rôle have been spasmodic and apparently quite brief—a youthful outbreak on the eve of the Scythian invasion in 626 B.C., a few words of support for the Deuteronomic reforms of 621 B.C., and then a silence of some fourteen or fifteen years. The half of his life is gone, but as yet his contributions to prophecy have been meagre indeed. It is, of course, possible that those earlier years were crowded with prophetic activities of which the record was either never kept or has been lost. An interpolation by a later hand appears, indeed, to claim for him an unbroken succession of prophecies from 626 B.C. to 604 B.C., *these three and twenty years.*² But there is no other hint to this effect, and his influence on the remarkable religious movements of those stirring years has been allowed to pass

¹ II⁹.² 25⁸.

entirely unrecorded alike in his own biography and in the *Book of Kings*.

The impression remains, therefore, that in spite of his vow of celibacy, and his self-denying rule of life, Jeremiah had not as yet adopted prophecy as a profession. In one sense he never did. The old prophetic guilds, which had played so important a part in the national life from the time of Elijah to Isaiah, never quite emerged from the cloud under which they had fallen in the dark days of Manasseh. They had salved their existence at the cost of their independence, and the suffocating pall of Erastianism had descended upon the professional prophets almost as heavily as on the professional priests. Denunciation of such time-serving prophets is a continual refrain in the *Book of Jeremiah*, as we have seen. *The prophets prophesy lies in my name : I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake I unto them : they prophesy unto you a lying vision. . . . Both the prophet and the priest go about the land and have no knowledge.*¹ Henceforward genuine prophecy becomes more and more a matter of the individual, of some one outstanding soul directly and specifically called by God from among his brethren to reveal the Divine will to men. The typical prophet is henceforward "a voice crying in the wilderness," and nothing is more characteristic of Jeremiah than his sense of utter loneliness and frustration. *Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, they that watch for my halting.*²

If it was not until the reign of Jehoahaz that Jeremiah definitely took this solitary stand,

¹ 14^{14, 18}.

² 20¹⁰.

cutting himself off from his familiar friends and interests, we might naturally ask, What was his main preoccupation during the interval? This we can only conjecture from the personal references scattered throughout his Book. Judging by these, he seems to have kept in close touch both with his native village of Anathoth and with the Temple and court circles in Jerusalem. That he was a man of means is clearly indicated. No homeless friar-like prophet this, carrying his bag for the alms of passers-by, but the owner of landed estates and with cash at his command. His conscience is clear as to his management of this trusteeship: *I have not lent on usury, neither have men lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me.*¹ To the end of his life in Jerusalem, even after his imprisonment, he retained his property and transacted business in connection with it, as we shall see.

It is just possible that some of these years were spent in foreign travel. Biblical scholars hesitate to take literally the story of his journey to the far east, where he tells us, *I went to Euphrates, and digged, and took the girdle from the place where I had hid it,*² for it is difficult to imagine what could have taken him to Mesopotamia in those troublous days when Nineveh had been destroyed, yet Nebuchadrezzar, still a young general in the Babylonian army, had been unable to compass the full destruction of Assyria. On the other hand, Jeremiah's prophecies against Babylon, which he delivered towards the end of his life, seem to reveal considerable personal knowledge of the country. His picture of the doomed city³ is full

¹ 15¹⁰.² 13⁷.³ 50, 51.

of local colour and detail, the truth of which archæology has checked. It may be that he paid more than one visit to the court of Nabopolassar, and that the high favour showed to the prophet by the Babylonians at the fall of Jerusalem, as well as the suspicion of pro-Babylonianism under which he fell, may have had some such explanation behind it.

On the death of Josiah, however, he seems to have taken up residence permanently in the Holy City. If we may press the preposition, when he says he went *down* to the potter's house, and *down* to the king's palace, he may have lived somewhere on the heights of Mount Moriah, near to the Temple precincts, in the very centre of things. With sad and foreboding heart he had joined the throng of mourners as they laid the body of Josiah to rest in the royal sepulchre, burying, as seemed only too certain, a glorious epoch in the grave of things dead and gone. Doubtfully he had listened to the acclamations of the populace as they chose Jehoahaz to be their king. And now, when the royal policy of upsetting the Deuteronomic reforms unfolds itself, he is forced to break silence. Once more Jeremiah is among the prophets: the fire of prophetic inspiration blazes up within him, and will not be denied. *If I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain.*¹

Under Jehoahaz all or nearly all of the old evils came flooding back. The idols of Egypt, of Assyria, even of Canaan were once more dragged

¹ 20⁹.

from their hiding-places, dusted down, and set up for worship. *According to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah ; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to the shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal.*¹ The prophet could see nothing but disaster in store for such a backsliding people, and from this moment his voice is uplifted in ever increasing urgency, bidding them fly from the wrath to come.

Nor had he any more sympathy with the secular policy of Jehoahaz. Realizing the immense latent energy of Babylon, he had foreseen from the first her ultimate triumph over the surrounding nations. But her hour had not yet come. For the moment Egypt was in the ascendant. Shallum's defiant attitude to the Pharaoh Necho was magnificent in its way, but it was suicide, not war. Doubtless the prophet did his best to convince the young king, but in vain ; he was riding to his death, and there were worse things than death. *Weep ye not for the dead*, he cried at last, in reference to Josiah, now safe in the bosom of Abraham, *neither bemoan him : but weep sore for him that goeth away ; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country. For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place : He shall not return thither any more ; but in the place whither they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more.*²

This terrible prophecy was soon fulfilled. Jehoahaz had been scarcely three months on his tottering throne before the Pharaoh Necho suddenly

¹ II 13.² 22 10.

summoned him to the Egyptian headquarters at Riblah. No doubt his spies had informed him that the young king was not to be trusted, and he could not afford to leave so powerful a fortress as Jerusalem unsubmissive on his flank. At any rate Jehoahaz failed to appease him. Summarily deprived of his throne, he was loaded with chains, and sent away to captivity in Egypt, where he died a miserable death.

Necho, however, had neither the time nor the desire to besiege Jerusalem in force. It suited his plans better to leave the city intact, but in the control of hands which would hold it in the Egyptian interest. Looking round for a more pliable vassal than Jehoahaz, he found him in the latter's elder brother Eliakim. There were two good reasons why Eliakim would do. In the first place, his title to the throne was indisputable, and would probably be acknowledged without much difficulty by the Jews. In the second place, he was evidently prepared to go to any lengths to curry favour with Egypt in return for a throne.

In the year 607 B.C., therefore, Judah was once more enclosed within the barbed fences of the Egyptian empire as she had been in the days of Rameses the Great, with a new king a mere vassal of the Pharaoh. In accordance with custom and with the threefold object of publishing this submission, of claiming the Divine approval, and of indicating his tolerance of the native religion, Necho changed the name of the new king to Jehoiakim, or Jehovah-has-promoted. So it is under this name that the unhappy sovereign begins his reign.

CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER OF PROPHECIES

ZEPHANIAH, NAHUM, AND EARLIER YEARS
OF JEREMIAH

B.C.

650.	MANASSEH.	? Birth of Jeremiah and Zephaniah.
641.	AMON.	
639.	JOSIAH.	
627.	Death of Ashurbanipal. Decline of Assyria.	
626.	Scythian Menace from North.	Call of Jeremiah (<i>Jeremiah</i> 1-6; 14-17 ¹⁻⁴). Prophecies of <i>Zephaniah</i> .
624.	Scythians withdraw.	
621.	Reforms of Josiah. <i>Deuteronomy</i> , Single Sanctuary, etc.	
620.		<i>Jeremiah</i> 11 ¹⁻⁸ ; 11 ^{18ff} 12 ¹⁻⁸ ; 17 ^{5ff} ; 13.
616.	Nabopolassar of Babylon.	
612.	Fall of Nineveh.	Prophecies of <i>Nahum</i> .
609.	Pharaoh Necho.	
607.	Kills Josiah at Megiddo.	
607.	SHALLUM, JEHOAHAZ.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 11 ⁹⁻¹⁷ ; 22 ¹⁻¹⁸
607.	Deposition of Shallum.	

CHAPTER VI

JEREMIAH (B) AND HABAKKUK

WITH the accession of Jehoiakim to the throne of Judah in 607 B.C., the flood of Jeremiah's prophecies pours forth in full spate, and from now onwards one feels that at last the hour for which he had lived has come. As he plays his nobly tragic part in the drama of the decline and fall of Jerusalem, we realize that it is this period of the prophet's life which makes Jeremiah what he is, one of the very greatest figures on the Old Testament stage, and in many respects the nearest prototype to the Man of Sorrows Himself.

We are supremely fortunate in possessing a record of the prophet at this stage of his career more personal, more intimate, and more complete than that of any other character of the Old Testament. Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, the prophet had attracted to himself a young disciple and friend named Baruch. Like Jeremiah, he seems to have been a man of some social standing in Jerusalem, and one who might well have followed a more lucrative profession than that of scribe to an unpopular prophet. But, like many another man of God, he forsook all this to follow one who was despised and rejected of men, though not, at first, without a backward glance. *O Baruch: Thou didst say, Woe is me now! for the LORD hath added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning, and I find no rest. . . . And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them*

*not.*¹ Very quickly he saw that there was no sorrow like unto his master's sorrow, no pain like unto his, and for the rest of the aged prophet's life the two men became inseparable. It is to the pen of Baruch that we owe that wonderful collection of mingled history, prophecy, and biography which we call the *Book of Jeremiah*.

When the Pharaoh Necho compelled Jerusalem to accept Jehoiakim as his vassal and her king, a heavy tribute and increased taxation brought dismay to every household in the country. But this was not the worst. Foreign contamination bore its usual fruit of evil, and the old sins of unfaithfulness to Jehovah added spiritual to political chaos. Even by those who should have known better, the solemn covenant of Josiah and the sacred Book of the Law were either forgotten or remembered only in lip-service and hollow ceremonial.

Jeremiah, sorrowfully watching these changes, must have been reminded at every turn of the bad old days of his youth when Manasseh had laid the prophets of Jehovah under an interdict, and all Judah groaned to find itself heathen. How strange and uncertain is the way of a man with his God: how just and inescapable the way of God with man! Restlessly, with some such meditation in his heart, the prophet goes down to the lower city. Something draws him to linger by the open doorway of a potter's house, watching the man at his work. A beautifully designed vessel is being turned on the wheel: suddenly it cracks, and loses form: quickly the potter snatches it up, crushes it into a lump of clay, and starts to whirl it round

into another shape. It is a vivid object-lesson on the way of God with men. *Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.*¹

From that moment Jeremiah prophesies unceasingly against backsliding Israel, fearlessly denouncing the sins of princes and king, prophets and priests, and a people only too willing to be led astray. *The virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing. . . . For my people hath forgotten me, they have burnt incense to vanity.*² . . . *Because they have forsaken me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it unto other gods, . . . and have filled this place with the blood of innocents.*³

To say that Jeremiah was unpopular is to understate the case. In no other biography of a writing prophet do we find such a bitter and personal animosity against the preacher. One feels that there was more in this than meets the eye, and that even the soul-searching ruthlessness of his denunciations does not entirely account for it. Perhaps it was that he seemed a traitor to his own family at the deserted shrine of Anathoth, to his old friends and tenants on the family estate whose business had been ruined by that desertion, to his own country in her hour of humiliation and impoverishment.

His intrusion into the capital and the Temple was particularly resented. One day Pashhur, son of the "chief officer" or provost of the Temple, rushed hot-foot to the spot within the precincts where Jeremiah was even then haranguing the crowd, struck him publicly on the mouth, and ordered the Temple servants to lock the fellow up

¹ 18⁶.² 18¹³.³ 19⁴.

in the stocks till his ardour should be cooled. This was the first actual violence which the prophet had suffered, and all his manhood was outraged. *I am become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocketh me.*¹ But if they hoped to break his spirit, they were mistaken.

Within a few days after his release, the indomitable prophet was back again in the Temple, denouncing God's wrath more pointedly than ever against those who defiled it with their sins. *Thus saith the LORD : If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, . . . then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.*² Priest and prophet, like the priests and Pharisees on a later occasion, glanced askance at one another. Destroy the Temple, indeed! But Jeremiah spared them not. *Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, are these.*³ No temple on earth could save such a congregation of robbers, murderers, adulterers, liars, and idolaters from the just punishment of their sins. *Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?*⁴

The priests and prophets listened angrily to this call for a drastic cleansing of the Temple, but worse was still to come. Turning to the altar of sacrifice, Jeremiah now poured scathing contempt upon the notion that by mere ritual and ceremonial men could hoodwink the Almighty. In vain, saith the Lord of Hosts, do ye *add your burnt offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat ye flesh.*⁵

¹ 20⁷.² 26⁴.³ 7⁴.⁴ 7¹¹ (Matt. 21¹³ etc.).⁵ 7²¹.

The Lord desireth not insincere offerings, but that men should hearken unto His voice. Woe unto you, false priests, false prophets, for you have rendered the word of God of none effect by your ordinances. *How do ye say, We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes hath wrought falsely.*¹

At this the priests could contain themselves no longer. He hath spoken blasphemy: what need we any further witness? At a sign from Pashhur, the Temple servants laid hold on him, crying, *Thou shalt surely die.*² The stage was quickly set for a trial on a charge of blasphemy and sedition. A great multitude gathered round. The princes of Judah heard the tumult as they sat in council, and at once came over to the Temple. Excitedly priests and prophets made their accusation against the prisoner, clamouring for the death sentence: *This man is worthy of death.*³ But the princes, calling for silence, allowed him to make his defence. It was at the Lord's bidding, he protested, that he had prophesied against the Temple and the city: he had been sent to call them all to repentance and amendment of life. As for himself, *Behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye shall bring innocent blood upon yourselves.*⁴

The princes were impressed: the man was claiming privilege, the well-understood privilege of a prophet. He was not the first prophet by any means to prophesy evil on the city. The case of Micah a century earlier was recalled, and his terrible prophecy quoted word for word, that *Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall*

¹ 8⁸.² 26⁸.³ 26¹¹.⁴ 26¹⁴.

*become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest.*¹ Yet King Hezekiah had never dreamed of putting Micah to death. The balance was finally swayed in Jeremiah's favour by the advocacy of the aged Ahikam (a friend of his father's ?²), and the prophet was released.

Attention was now diverted to another kaleidoscopic change in the political situation. It seemed that Pharaoh Necho's procrastination at Riblah was about to cost him very dear. The remnant of the Assyrian forces rallying at Carchemish on the Upper Euphrates had dwindled beyond recovery, and when the Egyptian reinforcements arrived they were called upon to oppose the oncoming Babylonians, under a brilliant young general called Nebuchadrezzar, practically single-handed. The result was a foregone conclusion. Nebuchadrezzar routed his adversaries almost without a blow, scattered the last of the Assyrians to the winds, and chased the Egyptian rabble helter-skelter southward along the Riblah-Megiddo road. The battle of Carchemish, in fact, fought in the year 605 B.C., marked the fall of two ancient empires, Nineveh and Egypt, and nothing prevented the utter annihilation of Necho's army save the fact of King Nabopolassar's sudden death, and the urgent recall of Nebuchadrezzar to be crowned king of Babylon in his place.

The first year of Nebuchadrezzar, which was also the "fourth year of Jehoiakim king of Judah," or 604 B.C., marks another stage in Jeremiah's prophecies. He now sees quite clearly that the new king of Babylon is the appointed agent through whom God should punish Israel. *I will*

¹ 26¹⁸=Micah 3¹².

² 2 Kings 22¹⁴.

send unto Nebuchadrezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant,¹ saith the Lord, to avenge me upon Judah, and she shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.² Long afterwards men remembered this prophecy, and how exactly seventy years passed between the destruction of the Temple in 586 B.C. and its rebuilding at the restoration in 516 B.C. Henceforward the menace of Nebuchadrezzar hangs like a sword of Damocles over the pinnacles of Zion.

But here was a problem. What had Nebuchadrezzar or Chaldaea (as the land of Babylon was called) done to deserve such success at the hand of the Lord? Jeremiah does not answer that, but he puts it in another way. The peoples whom Babylon was on the eve of destroying had undoubtedly earned God's punishment. God worked through human agents, and in His wisdom chose whom He would to effect His purpose. There is no idealization of Nebuchadrezzar in the way that the Second Isaiah fifty years later idealized Cyrus of Persia. Chaldaea in this case is a mere temporary sword in the hand of the Lord, and when its usefulness is over, Babylon too shall be broken to pieces. *It shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD.*³

HABAKKUK

JEREMIAH was not the only prophet to feel the difficulty of explaining Babylon's striking successes. In the Temple choir at Jerusalem a

¹ 25⁹.

² 25¹¹.

³ 25¹².

Levite named Habakkuk, influenced perhaps by the personality of Jeremiah, now broke forth into prophecy. Of the man himself, though later Jewish tradition weaves a web of romance about his name, we know nothing at all, save what few hints may be gathered from his little Book. The first part of his work is laconically headed *The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see*,¹ which informs us merely that he was acknowledged as inspired. The last chapter takes the form of a beautiful little anthem, dedicated to the chief musician for use in the Temple services to the accompaniment of stringed instruments. It is a hymn of trust in God:

*For though the fig tree shall not blossom,
Neither shall fruit be in the vines ;
The labour of the olive shall fail,
And the fields shall yield no meat ;
The flock shall be cut off from the fold,
And there shall be no herd in the stalls :
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.²*

The lovely lyric from which this stanza is quoted was composed in some quiet hour of the poet's life, we cannot even guess the year. It is a hymn to which any man at any time might sing Amen.

The earlier chapters of his prophecy, however, we can definitely fix as referring to the period immediately following the Babylonian victory at Carchemish. In that victory, Habakkuk, like Jeremiah, discerns the hand of God. *For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation ;*

¹ I¹.² 3¹⁷.

which march through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful.¹ . . . They come all of them for violence; their faces are set eagerly as the east wind; and they gather captives as the sand.² Yet to the man of imperfect understanding in the ways of the Lord, it is hard to see why the Chaldaean should so triumph over peoples at the least no worse than he. It is the old problem, Why doth the wicked prosper? Well might it be asked, *Why holdest thou thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?*³

Let the people of God take comfort, is the kernel of the prophet's message. God is good; we shall be punished, but *we shall not die.*⁴ God is of *purser eyes than to behold evil.*⁵ He knows His own, and will save them: *the just shall live by his faith.*⁶ Although all creation groan and travail in pain for a while, yet "God's in His heaven; all's right with the world"—*The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.*⁷ One day, when the evil is overpast, all nations of men shall cease from strife to worship the One Lord Jehovah, and the prophecy of the great Isaiah shall be fulfilled: *The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.*⁸

In the meantime, the will of the Lord must be accepted, even if it be not fully understood. In some mysterious way God is working His purpose out through the dreaded Nebuchadrezzar. *O LORD, thou hast ordained him for judgement; and thou, O Rock, hast established him for correction.*⁹

¹ I 6. ² I 9. ³ I 13. ⁴ I 12. ⁵ I 13. ⁶ 2 4.
⁷ 2 20. ⁸ Isaiah 11 9 = Habakkuk 2 14. ⁹ I 12.

But his time is not long. When his end is served, God will visit on the Chaldæan the due reward of his pride. *Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and that ladeth himself with pledges! Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them?*¹ . . . *Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity!*² Like Jeremiah he foresees, though not in such clear detail, the ultimate downfall of the oppressor.

THE FIRST SURRENDER

NEITHER Jeremiah nor Habakkuk could have been of much immediate comfort to the king of Judah when in the year 603 B.C. Nebuchadrezzar demanded the submission of Jerusalem. For three humiliating and oppressive years Jehoiakim had no option but to pay tribute with what grace he could to his new master. But it consoled him not at all that the prophecies of Jeremiah had been fulfilled, and that even more painful sufferings were foretold for the near future.

After the episode of the trial, Jeremiah had naturally been forbidden access to the Temple. But he was not to be so easily outdone. Luckily for us, he bethought himself of the expedient of getting his friend Baruch to write down on paper what he had to say and then to read it out on his behalf within the Temple walls.

One crowded fast-day, in the "fifth year of Jehoiakim," Baruch boldly entered the sacred precincts and made straight for the upper court. We can

¹ 2⁶.

² 2¹².

imagine the general mystification as the young man stood before the crowded assembly with the roll of the book in his outstretched hands, and in a loud voice began to read. Puzzlement changed to consternation, consternation to sudden comprehension of the trick. The voice was the voice of Baruch, but the words were the words of Jeremiah. Micaiah, son of the owner of the chamber from whose terrace the reading had taken place, ran with tingling ears to tell his tale. A council meeting happened to be in progress, and Baruch was summoned to attend at once. *Sit down now, and read it in our ears*, said the princes. When he had done so, *they turned in fear one toward another*, and proceeded to cross-examine the young man as to how he had come by the book. There was no need to name names. *He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book*,¹ said Baruch simply. Then, bidding Baruch and his master go into hiding, they reported the matter to the king himself.

Jehoiakim was not content with a mere report: he must needs see this pernicious book for himself. In his vivid way Baruch describes the scene as it was afterwards told him. *The king sat in the winter house in the ninth month (December): and there was a fire in the brasier burning before him. And it came to pass, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, that the king cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brasier, until all the roll was consumed. . . . And they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants.*² But when the angry monarch

¹ 36¹⁸.² 36²².

sent to arrest the writer and his master, they were nowhere to be found.

Jeremiah and Baruch, in fact, were already busy in seclusion with the re-writing of the whole book. All the words of the previous roll were transcribed once more from the prophet's lips, *and there were added besides unto them many like words*, including a special word of prophecy, very ominous, directed against the unrepentant Jehoiakim.¹

The punishment was not long delayed. After three years of submission to Nebuchadrezzar, Jehoiakim foolishly fancied he saw a chance of escape, and refused to pay his annual tribute. At once the thunderbolts of Babylon were let loose. Advance forces of Chaldæans, with their loyal vassals of Syria, Moab, and Ammon, marched upon Jerusalem, devastating the countryside up to the very walls. Jehoiakim was utterly unprepared. He had trusted in Egypt, but his trust was as usual in vain. The land was ravaged far and wide, many of the inhabitants fleeing for refuge into the already overcrowded city.

It was not long before Nebuchadrezzar's main forces arrived upon the scene, and Jerusalem was closely invested. At first Jehoiakim surveyed the serried ranks of the enemy with supreme confidence, secure in the natural defences of his almost impregnable fortress, and relying still upon the promised help from Egypt.

But alas ! Egypt never came, and as the anxious weeks grew into months, it became clear that she never intended to come. At last, heart-broken by the thought of the folly and sin which had

brought his beloved city into such a case, Jehoiakim fell sick, and with the thud of the battering-rams in his dying ears, passed on.

When his son Jehoiachin, or Coniah, a mere youth of eighteen years, ascended the tottering throne, the outlook was as dark as it could possibly be. *Though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee thence. . . . And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die.*¹ Thus the prophet Jeremiah, and it was not long before his prophecy was fulfilled.

A bare three months after his coronation, poor Jehoiachin with his royal retinue sadly unbarred the gate of Zion, and walked with bowed heads and uplifted hands straight to the tent of the Babylonian general. The terms of the conqueror were hard. The lives of the king and his people were spared, but many of the more notable of them, including Jehoiachin himself, were banished for ever from the Holy Land, and transported to the banks of the distant Chebar in Babylonia. Amongst the exiles was the prophet Ezekiel, and possibly also one Daniel, famous in after years for his wise and holy life. It is significant of the favour which was consistently shown to Jeremiah that, though he was certainly not one of the "poorest sort of the people of the land," the Chaldæans allowed him to remain behind. Needless to say, Nebuchadrezzar exacted a heavy indemnity for the trouble that Jerusalem had cost him, denuding both the Temple and the royal palace of their treasures.

¹ 22²⁴.

Finally, he appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, to be king of Judah in the Babylonian interest. With the year of Zedekiah's accession, 597 B.C., the last phase of the city and house of David begins.

One would have thought that the only possible policy for the new king was one of unequivocal submission to Nebuchadrezzar, who, as Jeremiah pointed out, was now the unassailable master of the east. *The nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadrezzar, . . . that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand.*¹ It is hard to understand the reckless optimism which even in that darkest of days deluded the stricken remnant of the people in Jerusalem, and induced many of the so-called prophets to tickle their ears by promise of a speedy reversal of fortune. It was a thankless task to disillusion them, but Jeremiah had to do it. *Hearken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold the vessels of the LORD'S house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you.*² The prophet Hananiah was particularly wild and foolish: he even named a period of two years as the limit of the exile in Babylon.³ Suiting the action to the word, he publicly broke from off Jeremiah's neck the wooden yoke which the latter had worn as a sign of Judah's servitude. *Thou hast broken the bars of wood, said Jeremiah sadly, but thou shalt make in their stead bars of iron.*⁴

To the same effect is Jeremiah's famous letter to the exiles in Babylonia. There, too, false pro-

¹ 27⁸.² 27¹⁶.³ 28³.⁴ 28¹³.

phets were beguiling the home-sick captives with promises of a speedy return, but Jeremiah will not have them so deluded. His advice to them is to settle down for a long stay: *Build ye houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them; take ye wives, and beget sons and daughters. . . . And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace.*¹

Nevertheless, since there is no smoke without fire, it is probable that the optimism of these false prophets had some excuse in the political situation. Egypt was now on the up-grade. It is probable that already Zedekiah had listened a moment or two longer than was wise to the seductive whispers of the pro-Egyptian party, and that it was to clear himself of suspicion that he visited Babylon personally in the fourth year of his reign.² Little could he have guessed that in the baggage of his retinue on that occasion was one of the most incriminating documents conceivable, namely a fierce denunciation of Babylon written by Jeremiah. In a sudden vision the prophet had seen the oppressor crushed in her turn. *Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: howl for her; take balm for her pain.*³ . . . *O thou that dwellest upon many waters, abundant in treasures, thine end is come.*⁴ . . . *I will render unto Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in your sight, saith the LORD.*⁵ The document, fortunately, never fell into Nebuchadrezzar's hands, for after being read to the

¹ 29⁵.
⁴ 51¹³.

² 51⁵⁹.
⁵ 51²⁴.

³ 51⁸.

exiles it was tied to a stone and sunk deep in the Euphrates: *Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again.*¹

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM

For a time Zedekiah did grudging homage to Babylon. But in 589 B.C. the wily diplomat Hophra became Pharaoh of Egypt, and held out such fair promises, not unaccompanied by a show of real efficiency, that Zedekiah gave way and took the fatal step of refusing tribute to Nebuchadrezzar.

Within a few months Jerusalem was again invested by the Chaldæans. Somewhat late in the day, King Zedekiah bethought him of securing Jeremiah's advice and moral support. *Inquire, I pray thee, of the LORD for us ; for Nebuchadrezzar maketh war against us : peradventure the LORD will deal with us according to all his wondrous works, that he may go up from us.*² Doubtless he hoped that Sennacherib's withdrawal from Jerusalem in answer to the prayers of Hezekiah and Isaiah a century earlier would be repeated in his own case. But Jeremiah held out no such hope. *I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, and his servants, and the people, . . . into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar, . . . and he shall smite them with the edge of the sword.*³ Only one thing could save them—immediate surrender to the enemy.

At first, however, it looked as though the prophet's gloomy forecast would be falsified. Strange but true, the Pharaoh Hophra actually kept his word, and marched in force to the relief

¹ 51⁶⁴.

² 21².

³ 21⁷.

of Jerusalem. The Babylonians, taken by surprise and greatly outnumbered, hastily withdrew, and Zedekiah breathed again. Gleefully he summoned Jeremiah to the presence. Now what have you to say? he asked. But the prophet was as uncompromising as ever. *Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city; and they shall take it, and burn it with fire. Thus saith the LORD, Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us: for they shall not depart.*¹

It must have been a delicious moment for the pro-Egyptian party. The croakers were confounded, and Jeremiah in particular fell under a cloud. One day, when going forth from the city to see how his estates in Anathoth were faring, he was arrested by the military on a charge of desertion to the Babylonians, still hovering on the Samaritan frontier. The prophet indignantly denied it, but this time the princes sided against him, and he was flung into prison.

The thrilling story of the prophet's imprisonment and narrow escape from death makes one of the most vivid narratives of the Old Testament. It would seem that in the first instance he was merely confined to a room within a private house.² But Gedaliah, the son of Jeremiah's old enemy Pashhur, was not content with this. He so worked upon the princes that nothing short of the prophet's death would do, *forasmuch as he weakeneth the hands of the men of war that remain in this city.*³ So—Zedekiah, like Pontius Pilate, washing his hands of the affair—they took the prophet forth

¹ 37⁷.² 37¹⁵.³ 38⁴.

and cast him into one of the foulest dungeons in the castle keep.¹ Imagine a sheer-sided cylindrical pit sunk deep in the solid rock, intended originally for the storage of water. Palestine is covered with such cisterns, the mire and filth at the bottom of them full of embedded refuse and often dead men's bones. Into such a charnel pit, still waist deep in stagnant ooze, the prophet, now in advancing years, was roughly flung and left to die. As nightfall dropped a lid over the round hole many feet above his head, burying him in the clammy, creeping darkness like a rat in a sewer, it must have seemed the end at last. A little longer and his weary knees would fail, he would sink beneath the mire. *Save me, O God, perhaps he cried in the words of the psalm, for the waters are come in, even unto my soul. I stick fast in the deep mire, where no ground is. The zeal of thine house hath even eaten me. Take me out of the mire that I sink not. Let not the water-flood drown me, neither let the deep swallow me up: and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me.*²

Suddenly his prayer was answered. Stealthy movements were heard at the mouth of the pit: a voice uncouth and foreign yet sweeter-sounding than a Temple singer whispered hoarsely down to him. It was Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian eunuch, come to his rescue in the nick of time. In a moment or two something shapeless and bulky came bumping softly down the dark sides of the pit, hanging from a rope paid out from above. It was a bundle of old rags which the prophet's numbed fingers unfastened in the darkness as well as they could, and stuffed cushion-wise

¹ 38^b.

² Psalm 69 (P.B.).

beneath his arm-pits to take the strain of the loop around his chest. On the word that all was firm, his rescuers hauled on the rope, and very soon Jeremiah was standing once more on the floor of the keep.

It seemed that Ebed-Melech had gone quietly to the king, pleading for the prophet's life, an act of kindness for which, on Jeremiah's intercession,¹ his life was spared at the subsequent fall of the city. Doubtless Zedekiah had never thought his princes would go so far, and was horrified by the description of Jeremiah's sufferings. At any rate, he not only permitted him to be drawn up out of the pit, but arranged a personal interview with him. Accordingly on the following morning king and prophet, at a secret meeting-place near the palace, came face to face. *I will ask thee a thing: hide nothing from me,*² said the king, promising that whatever he said his life should be spared.

But the weary prophet's message was still the same: *If thou wilt go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, then thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire.*³ Unconditional surrender was the only hope, and Jeremiah begged him to hearken to this, the voice of God Himself. But Zedekiah was more afraid of his own subjects than he was, at that time, of the Babylonians. He ended the interview by repeating his promise of safety to Jeremiah, but on condition that no word was breathed of what had passed between them. The prophet was sent back to prison, but not to the noisome oubliette from which he had escaped. He was consigned instead to the comparatively comfortable confinement of the court

¹ 39¹⁵.² 38¹⁶.³ 38¹⁷.

of the guard, until the fall of the city eighteen months later brought him release.

It must not be thought that Jeremiah's prevision of the future was one of unrelieved despondency. He had always made it clear that, should the people repent of their evil ways, the just anger of the Lord would turn to mercy. But in any case, such was the love of God for Israel that, after chastising them for a little while, He would one day restore them to peace and happiness again. As a proof of his confidence in the final outcome we have the quaint story of Jeremiah's business interview with Hanamel, his cousin, while still in prison in the guard-room. A certain plot of ground in Anathoth was for sale, and Jeremiah, by right of inheritance, had the option on it. To the ordinary business man the purchase of real property in those troublous days must have appeared a very risky proposition, but Jeremiah at once perceived the opportunity for one of those striking object-lessons so dear to all the prophets. So *I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel mine uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. And I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. . . . And I delivered the deed of the purchase unto Baruch the son of Neriah.*¹ The meaning of the object-lesson was obvious to all. The enemy would not overrun Judah for ever: *For thus saith the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land.*²

The immediate future, however, suddenly darkened over completely. Egypt withdrew, as Jere-

¹ 32⁹.

² 32¹⁵.

miah had foreseen, and the Chaldæans returned with all their world-famous siege engines to the assault on Jerusalem. Soon the city was in the direst straits. At last there remained not a scrap of bread in the place, nor a spark of hope in the hearts of the defenders. Quietly, one moonless night, the king and the survivors of his garrison gathered in the palace garden, unbarred the gate, and fled pell-mell for the open plain. It was a forlorn hope: the chariots of Babylon soon caught up with the fugitives—they had got no further than Jericho—and Zedekiah was taken. His fate was even more dreadful than the prophet had foretold. Haled before the tribunal of Nebuchadrezzar at Riblah, he was tried and received no mercy. After seeing his sons slain in cold blood before his eyes, he was blinded, loaded with chains, and carried off to Babylon, where he died in misery.¹

In the meanwhile Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian commander-in-chief, took signal vengeance on the rebellious city. This time he would make sure it should never give trouble again. All the important houses in the city, from the king's palace to the House of God, he burnt with fire: the colossal walls and towers which had resisted five centuries of attack he smashed and razed to the ground; every ounce of gold and silver, and every object of value was packed up for transport to Babylon; seventy of the city's leading men were executed; and all the remaining citizens, save the very poorest, crowded together into one enormous internment camp at Ramah preparatory to being driven into exile. Thus in the fateful year 586

¹ 2 Kings 25⁴.

B.C. Jerusalem fell. It was the end of the house of David as a temporal dynasty, the end of the Jewish nation as a territorial power, the end of Mount Zion as the inviolate fortress of the Lord of Hosts.

But it was the beginning, as Jeremiah already dimly perceived, of a new Jerusalem made without hands, of the house of David spiritually supreme amongst the kings of the earth, and of a Chosen People conquering the world by suffering and by faith. Even in the darkest hour the prophet foresees these happier days. *Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries, whither I have driven them, . . . and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God.*¹

So Jeremiah, himself a prisoner like the rest, becomes the prophet of comfort and hope to the downcast captives, as they drag their chains about the concentration camp at Ramah on the eve of their long march to the east. Sad indeed is the scene in that assembly of broken hearts. *A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuseth to be comforted for her children, because they are not.*² Some are dead, some are lost, some have fled away who knows where, and all of them now are without a country or a home.

But suddenly out of the thick darkness comes a great cry of hope, as the prophet sees all heaven opened in a lightning flash, and the captives look up to hear that famous promise of the New Covenant which is quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews,³ and wherein Hebrew prophecy reaches its high-

¹ 32³⁷.

² 31¹⁵ (Matt. 2¹⁸).

³ Hebrews 8⁸.

water mark: *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers. . . . But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the LORD; I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. . . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more.*¹

For Jeremiah himself came a speedy and unexpected reprieve. Nebuzaradan put himself to the trouble of finding the prophet among the captives, ordering his chains to be at once struck off. He then offered him the free choice of going as an honoured guest to Babylon, or of staying behind in Judah with the remnant of his kinsfolk. Jeremiah chose to stay. Doubtless he felt that his place was with the miserable leaderless people, too poor to be thought worth while transporting to Babylon, but yet the seed of Abraham, the beloved of the Lord.

EXILE IN EGYPT

EXILE was to be his lot, however, in spite of all. A certain Gedaliah, a Jew, had been appointed governor of what was now the Babylonian province of Judah, the seat of government being fixed in Mizpah. But the victors had scarcely withdrawn before the whole land was in a ferment. Scattered bands of Zedekiah's routed army reappeared like rabbits out of their holes: refugees who had fled to Moab and the bordering states came tip-toeing back: everyone who had a sword

and nothing else to lose was out for loot. Neighbouring potentates could not resist taunting the fallen, or hovering like hyenas around the wounded lion to snatch what they could. Among such, Edom, it would seem, made herself particularly obnoxious, earning a hatred which the Jews were long to remember, as we shall see from the impassioned oracles of Obadiah. The Ammonites too, under king Baalis, were willing to hurt although afraid to wound. The times required a governor in Mizpah of exceptional ability, decision, and watchfulness.

Such a man was not Gedaliah. Altogether too good-natured, unsuspicious, and slow to move, he could not bring himself to credit even the most circumstantial reports of hostile machinations against himself, far less to take action. The end soon came. A young pretender to the kingless throne of Judah, Ishmael by name, a descendant of the house of David, managed to enlist the secret support of the king of Ammon, and accompanied by an armed gang, treacherously assassinated the governor in his own house at Mizpah. Ishmael was quickly overcome by the loyal Johanan, deprived of his spoils, and driven out of the country. But the mischief was done.

The adventurer had not only slain a Babylonian official, he had cut down some Babylonian soldiers too; and, since Nebuchadrezzar was not noted for nice discriminations or undue patience, it seemed not at all unlikely that reprisals would be taken upon the whole population. In their anxiety, the self-appointed leaders of the people appealed to Jeremiah. The old prophet must have been in dire peril during Ishmael's raid on Mizpah, but

once more he had miraculously escaped with his life, an abiding witness to the truth of prophecy and the terrible justice of God. He had lived to see all that he loved built up to heights unknown before, then dashed down into the depths. Surely his cup of bitterness was full! The *Book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah*, though written by a later hand, well expresses the grief of the broken-hearted prophet. *Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow.*¹

Yet the event was to prove that even now the aged prophet had not yet drained the dregs of the cup. The panic-stricken people were on edge to escape from the long arm of Nebuchadrezzar. In vain Jeremiah assured them that their fears were groundless. *Be not afraid of the king of Babylon, . . . saith the LORD: for I am with you to save you.*² Let them but stay where they were, and all would be well. In vain he warned them against taking refuge in Egypt. *Everything whereof ye are afraid, shall follow hard after you there in Egypt; and there ye shall die.*³ It seemed his fate, like Cassandra of Troy, to see the future, oh, so clearly, yet always to be disbelieved. The "proud men" gave him the lie: it was *not* the voice of God: it was that fellow Baruch setting him on to lure them to death: to Egypt they would go, and willy nilly both Jeremiah and his friend must go with them.

So Jeremiah, torn from the homeland after all, was hustled off by his own countrymen into exile in Egypt, an exile even harder to endure than that of Babylon. To return to ill-omened idolatrous

¹ Lamentations I¹².

² 42¹¹.

³ 42¹⁶.

Egypt, strangers in an alien land, was to undo the work of Moses in more senses than one. Nor were the exiles even safe from pursuit. To the weary rabble of refugees halting at last at the frontier town of Tahpanhes (Daphne), Jeremiah gives one last warning. Placing some stones on the magnificent pavement in front of the Pharaoh's palace, he prophesies that before long *Nebuchadrezzar will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them. And he shall come, and shall smite the land of Egypt.*¹ They laughed at his words, but indeed it was not long before the ambitious Babylonian attacked Egypt in force, took Tahpanhes on his way, and put an end to the life of the Pharaoh Hophra in whom the refugees had put their trust. Thus, in 564 B.C., was fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah, *Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of them that seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, his enemy, and that sought his life.*²

Thus the closing years of the unhappy prophet find him a solitary figure moving unhindered but despised and rejected as ever among the scattered Jewish communities by the Nile. Even before the fall of Jerusalem these communities had been growing in number. The insidious lure of the flesh-pots and idols of Egypt, against which Moses and his successors had fought for a thousand years, quickly regained their hold upon the exiles. At Migdol, at Tahpanhes, at Noph which the Greeks called Memphis, the Jews returned like dogs to

¹ 43¹⁰.² 44³⁰.

their vomit, intermarrying with the Egyptians, sliding into their immoralities, and bowing before the heathen gods. The sacrifices which they could no longer offer on the altar of Zion they now offered to idols, especially to the lascivious Ishtar, so-called Queen of Heaven.¹ Against such iniquities Jeremiah thundered in season and out, gathering his failing strength to recall his faithless countrymen to their God. *Hear ye the word of the LORD, all Judah that dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by my great name, saith the LORD, that . . . I watch over them for evil, and not for good. And all the remnant of Judah, that are gone into the land of Egypt to sojourn there, shall know whose word shall stand, mine, or theirs.*²

One pictures him, as the end approaches, lying in a cell of the Jewish quarter of some Egyptian town, the faithful Baruch bending over him to catch the last whispers from his failing lips. Far away to the north-west over the parched sands is the Hill of Zion which he knows he will never see again, yet his indomitable heart is full of trust. *For thus saith the LORD: Like as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them.*³ Overhanging the doorway, as the sun slowly sinks, the great leafy branch of a date palm, full of fruitful promise, casts a welcome shadow over the room. Even such a Branch shall God raise up at the last to protect His people Israel: *In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David. . . . In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely:*

¹ 44¹⁷.² 44²⁶.³ 32⁴².

and this is the name whereby she shall be called, The LORD is our righteousness.¹ With some such words as these his head falls back upon the pillow, leaving Baruch alone with his tablets and his pen.

¹ 33¹⁵.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

HABAKKUK AND THE LAST YEARS OF JEREMIAH

B.C.

607.	Jehoiakim (Eliakim). Recrudescence of idolatry. Baruch, now friend of Jeremiah.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 18-20. Jeremiah in stocks. Preaches in Temple. <i>Jeremiah</i> 7, 8; 22 ¹⁸⁻¹⁹ ; 26.
605.	Battle of Carchemish.	
604.	Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon. Fourth year of Jehoiakim.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 25. Prophecies of <i>Habakkuk</i> . <i>Jeremiah</i> 46-49; 45 <i>Jeremiah</i> 36. His prophecies cut up by the King.
603.	Fifth year of Jehoiakim.	
	Jehoiakim vassal of Babylon three years.	
600.	Jehoiakim rebels. Jerusalem invested.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 12 ⁷⁻¹⁷ ; 35.
597.	Nebuchadrezzar besieges Jerusalem. Death of Jehoiakim.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 9, 10 ^{17 ff.}
597.	Jehoiachin, CONIAH. Surrenders to Chaldeans. First Captives to Babylon, with Ezekiel.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 10 ^{17 ff.} ; 22 ²⁰⁻²⁴ .
597.	ZEDEKIAH.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 27-29.
594.	Zedekiah's visit to Babylon.	<i>Jeremiah</i> 51 ^{59 ff}
589.	Hophra induces Zedekiah to rebel.	

B.C.

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| 588. | Nebuchadrezzar besieges Jerusalem. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 21, 34 ¹⁻⁷ . |
| 587. | Hophra raises siege. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 37, 38, 39 ^{1b ff} ;
32 ⁶⁻¹⁵ ; 34 ^{8 f} . |
| 586. | Siege renewed by Nebuchadrezzar. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 32 ^{1-5, 16 f.} ; 33. |
| 586. | Fall of Jerusalem.
Concentration camp at Ramah. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 39 ¹⁻¹⁴ ; 31. |
| 586. | GEDALIAH, Governor.
Exiles taken to Babylon. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 40. |
| | Gedaliah killed. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 41. |
| 585. | Flight to Egypt.
Exile in Egypt. | <i>Jeremiah</i> 42.
<i>Jeremiah</i> 43, 44; 10 ¹⁻¹⁸ ;
30; 50, 51 ¹⁻⁵⁸ . |
| 584. | ? Death of Jeremiah in Egypt. | |
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PROBABLE DATES OF JEREMIAH

1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 (626); 7, 8 (607); 9 (597); 10¹⁻¹⁶ (585); 10^{17 ff} (597); 11¹⁻⁸ (620); 11⁹⁻¹⁷ (607); 11^{18 ff}, 12¹⁻⁶ (620); 12^{7 ff} (600); 13 (620); 14, 15, 16, 17¹⁻⁴ (626); 17^{5 ff} (620); 18, 19, 20 (607); 21 (588); 22¹⁻¹² (607); 22¹³⁻¹⁹ (606); 22^{20 ff}, 23, 24 (597); 25 (604); 26 (607); 27, 28, 29 (597); 30 (585); 31, 32¹⁻⁵ (586); 32⁶⁻¹⁵ (587); 32^{16 ff}, 33 (586); 34¹⁻⁷ (588); 34^{8 ff} (587); 35 (600); 36 (603); 37, 38 (587); 39¹⁻¹⁴ (586); 39^{15 ff} (587); 40, 41 (586); 42, 43, 44 (585); 45, 46, 47, 48, 49 (604); 50, 51¹⁻⁵⁸ (585); 51^{59 ff} (594). [52 Editorial.]

CHAPTER VII

EZEKIEL AND OBADIAH

THE *Book of Ezekiel* tells us very little about the life-story of its writer, but at least it enables us to fit him compactly into an environment upon which other sources have shed a most brilliant light. It is thus possible to reconstruct a fairly vivid picture of the man who more than any other saved the life of Judaism from what might easily have proved the premature burial of the exile.

Born about the year 623 B.C., a son of Buzi the priest, of the lineage of Zadok, Ezekiel's earliest memories must have been of the Temple in Jerusalem, recently elevated to its unique position as the centre of Jewry by the reforms of King Josiah: his home in one of the priest's houses built upon the eastern wall, his playground the outer courts, his school within the precincts, Ezekiel's most impressionable years were indelibly stamped with a mental image of Solomon's great edifice, and the imposing rites which took place within its walls.

We can picture the mingled awe and pride with which as a boy he assisted his father in the sacred mysteries, perhaps as an acolyte preparing the incense, lighting the tapers within the holy place, or taking his part in the Temple choir, encouraged by a smile from the sweet singer Habakkuk, soon to become famous among the prophets of Israel.

Oftentimes he must have sat among the doctors

in the Temple, both hearing them and asking them questions, and it may well be that among them was the venerable writer of that manual of worship which we know as the *Law of Holiness*,¹ now bound up within the *Book of Leviticus*.² That Ezekiel was steeped in its language and ideas is evident, though he did not hesitate to improve upon it in his later years. Everything about the Temple, in fact—its architecture, its personnel, its ritual—became, and remained for ever, the grand passion of his life. It was a passion all the more devouring because at its height the lover was torn from his beloved, the beloved foully destroyed.

We shall never understand his characteristic point of view unless we realize the strength of this consuming passion. For him the holiness of God was independent, of course, of houses built with hands: but the holiness of man demanded that he should make for his God an earthly home where every stone should be a visible pledge of the divine presence, every ritual act a sacramental means of grace. Both by temperament and by training, in fact, Ezekiel belongs rather to the priestly than to the prophetic type.

Yet at the end of the seventh century B.C. no educated Israelite could remain uninfluenced by the prophetic point of view. The teaching of the great prophets of the past—Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah, and the Deuteronomist—had long ago been accessible in written form. That Ezekiel was saturated with the writings of Hosea in particular is evident in every chapter of his earlier prophecies.

¹ Leviticus 17-26.

² See Chapter IV, *The Deuteronomist*.

The living prophets of his own day—Jeremiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk—it is almost inevitable that he must have heard, and the influence of the first of these has profoundly coloured his work. There are passages of moral indignation and spiritual appeal which are pure Hosea or Jeremiah. But where the prophets begin to depreciate external observances in contrast with inward reality, there Ezekiel parts company with them at once. To him the due performance of the first seems the surest way of recapturing the second.

Ezekiel was a boy of about ten years old when the fall of Nineveh (612 B.C.), so dramatically foretold by Nahum the prophet, brought with it the collapse of the Assyrian power. Five years later, that fall indirectly involved the death of good King Josiah at the hands of the Pharaoh Necho, and the end of the halcyon period of the Deuteronomic reformation. For fourteen years Ezekiel's father and his fellow-priests in Jerusalem had been supremely happy, with the Temple and its ministrants in higher honour than they had ever been, but now all that was changed. Though the new king Jehoahaz reigned only a few months, they were quite long enough to show his lack of sympathy with Josiah's religious views. Once more the voice of Jeremiah, full of foreboding, was upraised. Good men trembled for the honour of the Temple, and soon, when the king was carried off in chains to Egypt, for the safety of Jerusalem itself.

Pharaoh Necho, however, filled with dreams of empire, had no wish to destroy the city. His appointment of the subservient Jehoiakim to be

king of the Jews in place of Jehoahaz not only secured the prompt payment of an enormous tribute from his grateful vassal, but resulted in continual intercourse between the Jewish court and Egypt. The youthful Ezekiel must have been quite old enough to realize the meaning of those new idols, which now began to appear in the streets of Zion unashamed, and must bitterly have lamented the laxity which penetrated even into the Temple itself.

Yet with how divided a mind he must have heard the stern denunciations of Jeremiah, as the aged prophet strode into the sacred precincts, reproaching the priests at the very steps of the altar! His secret heart must have told him only too well that they deserved it, yet all his instincts must have risen in revolt at the spectacle of the intruder publicly putting his friends to shame. It is noticeable that never, to the end of his life, could he bring himself to mention the name of Jeremiah or even to acknowledge his efforts to shepherd the wandering sheep of Jerusalem.

The defeat at Carchemish in 604 B.C. checked the ambitions of Egypt for many years, and henceforth it is Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon who fills the foreground of the picture. The story of this tumultuous period is well known. At first Jehoiakim submitted himself to his new overlord. But rebelling in 600 B.C., he found himself within a year or two closely invested by the armies of Babylon. For eighteen terrible months the city of David resisted the siege. In the midst of it Jehoiakim died, defiant to the end. But his successor Jehoiachin was soon forced to an unconditional surrender, and Nebuchadrezzar entered

the Holy City at the head of his triumphant army in 597 B.C.

His treatment of the troublesome fortress was, on this occasion, unexpectedly mild. So far from destroying it, he left standing not only the Temple and public buildings but even the battlemented walls, and gave it a renewed lease of life under a king of his own appointment (but still of the royal house of David), namely Zedekiah.

It was too much to hope, however, that he would spare the city's treasures. Ezekiel's heart must almost have broken as he saw his beloved Temple despoiled by the uncircumcised heathen. The vandal cared not a whit for the rare beauty and craftsmanship of the Temple vessels, still less for their sacred associations. Even the priceless vessels of Solomon, now over three hundred years old, were callously melted down for the gold which they contained, and dumped into the Babylonian sacks.

But worse was still to come. Nebuchadrezzar had no intention of leaving behind him a city full of angry young men liable to make trouble as soon as his back was turned. A net was cast around the inhabitants of the land through the meshes of which none but the smaller fry could escape. Into this net were gathered the ex-king Jehoiachin and all the chief men of the land, together with thousands of the more able-bodied warriors and artisans. And into these same toils the young Ezekiel, marked down as an aristocrat, found himself ruthlessly drawn.

BY THE WATERS OF BABYLON

EZEKIEL was still a young man, as the Jews accounted youth, when he said good-bye for ever to Jerusalem and was carried into captivity by the Chebar. For the first few years he was content to observe and meditate in silence. Impressions bewildering in their strangeness crowded upon him, demanding time for assimilation, and his call to prophecy did not come at once. Babylon under King Nebuchadrezzar was now at the height of its power, and every day added some new jewel to its diadem. It was impossible that the Jews, for all their inveterate suspicion of external influences, should fail to be impressed, and radical in many respects must have been the readjustment of their point of view.

Yet, with the best of them, it was not the present splendours of Babylon, but the lost Paradise of far-off Jerusalem which made the greatest impression. In itself, the "captivity" at this time was not rigorous. Apart from the impossibility of leaving the country, the exiles had little cause to complain. They were given a tract of land at Tel-Abib, on the banks of the Chebar canal not far from the amenities of the capital. The laws they had to observe, based upon the Code of Hammurabi, were similar to their own, and no obstacles were placed in the way of their religious or even civil organization. Families and clans could still be grouped as they desired, justice still be administered through their elders; those who could afford it (like Ezekiel) might occupy a house of their own, and every encouragement was given to commercial enterprise. Eventually one

of the most successful firms in Babylon was the powerful Jewish company of Marashu and Sons, whose business files have been discovered by the modern archæologist.

As to religion, it is clear that the exiles were able to observe their Sabbaths, their feasts, and their fasts to their heart's content: no check was put upon "freedom of speech," and even the separatist rite of circumcision was practised without hindrance.

Nevertheless, it was long before the Jews could bring themselves to settle down. The most popular prophets among them were those who foretold a speedy escape. The mails from Jerusalem were both frequent and heavy. Anyone who has lived in exile abroad will easily picture the eager hands outstretched for letters from the old country, and most welcome of all were those which told how Hananiah in Jerusalem had prophesied an exile of only two years' duration. By contrast, the most unpopular name amongst them was that of Jeremiah, who persisted in forecasting a banishment of *seventy* long years, and had even written from Jerusalem, advising them to settle down and build houses and plant gardens, and "seek the peace of Babylon," forsooth!

But very soon events gave the lie direct to foolish optimism. The two years mentioned by Hananiah passed without any sign of liberation. In the fourth year of the captivity (594 B.C.) the exiles crowded into Babylon to see King Zedekiah of Judah drive past in his chariot. But he had travelled all the way from Jerusalem merely to rivet the Babylonian yoke still more firmly upon his neck. The future seemed unrelievedly black.

Suddenly, in the fifth year of the captivity (593 B.C.), there came to Ezekiel a blinding light in the darkness, the unmistakable call of God which ranked him for ever afterwards among the prophets of Israel. *It came to pass in the (my) thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. In the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of the LORD was there upon him.*¹ Such is the characteristic heading to his book of prophecy, revealing from the first that strange mixture of reporter and visionary, priest and prophet, conscious literary artist and inspired poet, which meets us at every turn.

One clue to his prophecies we must hold fast. Unlike his predecessors, Ezekiel was first and foremost a *writing* prophet in the full literary sense: he *wrote* his sermons, as we should say, and they were intended for publication. In the *Book of Ezekiel* we have for the first time a literary unity carefully written, arranged, and edited by the author's own hand. For at his call, a hand was stretched out to him from heaven, *and, lo, a roll of a book was therein; and he spread it before me; and it was written within and without. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel.*² The *Book of Ezekiel* is thus probably the most "authentic" Book of the Old Testament, in the sense that we know exactly who the author

¹ I 1-3.

² 2 9.

was, and what and when he wrote. It is also, from the technical point of view, the most artistic, a symmetrical and beautifully balanced construction from base to pinnacle like the carefully designed plan of the ideal Temple with which his Book ends.

With this clue we shall easily understand his mode of expression. The command at the end of the above quotation (*eat . . . go . . . speak*), for instance, is to be taken not in a literal but in a literary way. The house of Israel, that is to say the remnant in Jerusalem whom he was addressing, were hundreds of miles away over the Syrian desert: it was physically impossible that he should "go" to them or "speak" in their ears. There is no need to attribute to him any psychical powers beyond those common to all the prophets. When he describes how *the spirit lifted me up between the earth and the heaven, and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem*,¹ the last thing he means to imply is "clairvoyance," or what is known as "levitation." Constant correspondence with his friends in Jerusalem through the highly organized Babylonian mails kept him as well informed about affairs in the old country as about the doings of his fellow-exiles. He "went" to them in spirit, he "spoke" to them by the written word, denouncing, warning, encouraging them from Babylon much in the same way as an exiled Churchman in Zanzibar might hurl prophetic thunderbolts at the erring stay-at-homes in Westminster.

God appeals to different men in different ways. Ezekiel's call came to him in a vision curiously

blended of poetry, art, and literary reminiscence, recalling features now of the call of Isaiah, now of God's appearance to Moses on the Mount, now of the interior of the Temple in Jerusalem. *And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard a voice of one that spake. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel. . . . And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall they know that there hath been a prophet among them.*¹ After this, when his spirit came down to earth, he found himself sitting among his fellow-exiles at Tel-Abib, *and I sat there astonished among them seven days.*² Like St. Paul, he had to pass through a period when the intensity of his spiritual experience caused actual physical disability. But at the end of the week, the call came even more distinctly: *Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.*³ There follows the solemn charge that was laid upon him *to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life,*⁴ and so, whether successful or not, to deliver his own soul.

Most of the prophecies of Ezekiel are carefully dated by the author. As early as 593 B.C. he sadly foresaw that the corruption in Jerusalem was too great to be purged by anything less than the destruction of the city. *Thou also, son of man, take thee a tile, and lay it before thee, and pourtray upon it a city, even Jerusalem: and lay siege against it.*⁵ Here we may well take the prophet's words literally for once: it would not be at all unlike him to draw an actual picture of Jerusalem besieged, and to send it to the city in illustration of his text.

¹ 28 f.² 3¹⁵.³ 3¹⁷.⁴ 3¹⁸.⁵ 4¹.

Naturally the purport of his despatches to Jerusalem was known at Tel-Ahib, and though his popularity was not enhanced thereby, there were some who listened with attention. In the year 591 B.C., he tells us how *it came to pass . . . as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the LORD God fell there upon me.*¹ Like most of the prophets and saints of all ages, he had his moments of special exaltation, and now he is carried in the spirit to the Temple in Jerusalem. Dreadful reports of abominations wrought within the sacred walls had reached him. In his vision it is as though he saw with his own eyes the idolatrous ritual of Jaazaniah and his fellow-priests in the Temple court, and the women weeping for Tammuz or worshipping the Sun without. *And behold, he adds quaintly, the man clothed in linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter.*² There follows by contrast a wonderful vision of the Lord in His glory looking down from heaven upon the erring sons of men.

The manner of Jerusalem's punishment grows clearer as the years pass. *They shall go into exile, into captivity,* foretells the prophet, like as he himself had been exiled. Even the blinding of King Zedekiah is dimly foreshadowed: *The prince that is among them shall bear upon his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth : . . . he shall not see the ground with his eyes. . . . I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans ; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.*³ All of which, as we shall see, was actually fulfilled.

The menacing tone of many of Ezekiel's utterances, no less than the special interest he takes in

¹ 8¹.² 9¹¹.³ 12¹².

ritual legislation, has sometimes caused men to overlook the tremendous moral and spiritual contribution which he made to the development of religion. This is not the place to enlarge on the point, but reference must at least be made to his constant insistence upon the moral responsibility of the individual soul to its Maker. No man shall be punished for another's sin. There shall be no more use in Israel for the proverb, *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge*,¹ for only the actual sinner shall be held guilty: *the soul that sinneth, it shall die*.² In the same way, no man can be saved by another's goodness: *they shall but deliver their own souls by their righteousness*.³ Yet no prophet lays more stress than Ezekiel upon the power of repentance to wipe away the most grievous sin: *when the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive*.⁴ It is not too much to say that upon these two propositions, set in the framework of the divine love, hang all the laws which save the souls of men.

Returning to the historical situation: in the year 591 B.C. Ezekiel, informed of King Zedekiah's secret intrigues with Egypt, denounced the treachery meditated against his liege lord Nebuchadnezzar. *He rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt. . . . Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things?*⁵ An oath was an oath, even when made to a heathen king. Here is another great advance in ethical perception: it was the word of an Israelite, to whomsoever given, and Zedekiah had broken it, *for he*

¹ 18².² 18⁴.³ 14²⁰.⁴ 18²⁷.⁵ 17¹⁵.

*hath despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand.*¹ For this the Lord Himself shall punish him: Zedekiah's fate shall be that of his predecessors, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin. The first had been taken captive by Pharaoh Necho in 607 B.C., when *they brought him with hooks unto the land of Egypt*:² the latter was now even a captive in Chaldæa—they *put him in a cage with hooks, and brought him to the king of Babylon*,³ a phrase, by the way, which (as contemporary pictures show) literally describes the fate of many vanquished princes. Even so shall *Oholibah* (Jerusalem) suffer the fate of her elder sister *Oholah* (Samaria), the penalty for her still greater sin.⁴ *Thou shalt drink of thy sister's cup, which is deep and large.*⁵

Meanwhile events at home moved forward to their inevitable climax. In 589 B.C. Psammetichus II. of Egypt was succeeded by the vigorous Pharaoh Hophra (Apries), who quickly gave the final push to Zedekiah's tottering loyalty, bringing him out into the open as a rebel against Babylon.

A year or two later Nebuchadrezzar sent the inevitable punitive expedition, and in 587 B.C. Jerusalem was once more in the throes of a bitter and remorseless siege. The prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah were fulfilled to the letter. By a strange coincidence, as it afterwards transpired, one of Ezekiel's most pointed forecasts was made on the very day that the attack began: *Son of man, write thee the name of the day, even of this selfsame day; the king of Babylon drew close unto Jerusalem*

¹ 17¹⁸.² 19⁴.³ 19⁹.⁴ 23¹.⁵ 23³².

*this selfsame day.*¹ The doom of the city was sealed.

The news of the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. gradually percolated through to Ezekiel in all its cruel detail. King Zedekiah, trying to escape by night, had been overtaken at Jericho. After seeing his sons put to death before his eyes, he had been deprived of his sight for ever, and flung into chains. Jerusalem itself had been razed to the ground, Temple, palace, battlements, and walls. The inhabitants were assembled in a huge internment camp at Ramah, and driven in chains across the desert to swell the dismal ranks of the exiles in Babylon. Nothing was left of the city of David, nor of his throne, nor of the sanctuary of the Lord. Only the poorest and most helpless of the Jews remained in the Holy Land, the third-rate town of Mizpah now their capital, the well-meaning but gullible Gedaliah their governor in the name of Babylon.

Some of Ezekiel's prophecies are dated as 570 B.C., so that he probably knew (though he nowhere mentions) the tragic events which added the final cup of bitterness to the miserable remnant in Palestine. Gedaliah was soon assassinated by a young pretender to the throne of David, named Ishmael. In the subsequent confusion the last of the Jews hastily packed up and fled to Tahpanhes in Egypt, where they found a welcome from the Pharaoh Hophra. They compelled Jeremiah to accompany them, and the last we hear of that unhappy prophet is his voice uplifted in vain warning against the contamination of Egypt, from which Moses hoped he had saved them eight hundred years before.

OBADIAH

IN the meantime the petty surrounding nations, who had long looked upon Jerusalem with envy, now openly rejoiced that her pride had had a fall. Ezekiel sternly denounced them for this: Ammon, *because thou saidst, Aha, against my sanctuary, when it was profaned*;¹ Tyre, *because she hath said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken that was the gate of the peoples: I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste*.² And so on.

Amongst the nations which Ezekiel thus singles out for special denunciation is Israel's unnatural brother Edom, the descendant of Esau. Consanguinity often makes jealousy the keener, and she had behaved particularly badly at the time of Israel's humiliation. *Behold, I am against thee, O mount Seir. . . . Because thou hast had a perpetual enmity, and hast given over the children of Israel to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity*.³ There are many passages in the Scriptures which show how long Jewry remembered the gloating hostility of the Edomites in her hour of need. The prejudice remained indeed even up to the time of Herod the Great, himself of Idumean (Edomite) blood.

Among those who denounced Edom was an otherwise unknown prophet called Obadiah, the Servant of the Lord. Exactly where or when his prophecy may have been uttered we do not know, but the feeling it expresses was engendered, at any rate, by the events following the fall of the Holy City and the exile of the Jews.

¹ 25³.² 26².³ 35⁵.

The vision of Obadiah is a short oracle delivered exclusively against Edom, foretelling her ruin, and prophesying the ultimate triumph of Jerusalem. *The pride of thine heart hath deceived thee, O thou that dwellest in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high,*¹ cries the prophet, pointing to the Edomite stronghold in Petra, whose amazing houses and temples may still be seen hewn out of the living rock. This is the celebrated "rose-red city half as old as time," its only access a narrow gorge overhung with sandstone cliffs, upon whose dizzy heights are perched the altars and pillars which are still the wonder of travellers. An impregnable fastness it must have been, yet *Though thou mount on high as the eagle, and though thy nest be set among the stars, I will bring thee down from thence, saith the LORD.*²

The prophet recalls how Edom had taken advantage of Jerusalem's necessity: *In the day that strangers carried away his substance, and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots upon Jerusalem, even thou wast as one of them. But look not thou on the day of thy brother in the day of his disaster, and rejoice not over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction.*³

In God's good time the tables shall be turned: *As thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee; thy dealing shall return upon thine own head.*⁴ It must be confessed that there is little in all this save the fierce cry of Jewish nationalism, bloody but unbowed. Later interpretations of the *Book of Obadiah*, indeed, tended to treat it allegorically, seeing in Edom a type of heathendom in general

¹ Obadiah ³.² Obadiah ⁴.³ Obadiah ¹¹.⁴ Obadiah ¹⁵.

triumphing momentarily over the truth, but soon to be vanquished in its turn.

The saving grace of Obadiah is his courage and his faith. When all is darkness, a tiny candle blazes like a torch; and the Jews for ever afterwards were grateful to him for the fact that in the darkest hour his confidence in Israel never failed. *In mount Zion there shall be those that escape, and it shall be holy; and the house of Jacob shall possess their possessions. . . . And saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD'S.*¹ Such words as these, such optimists as Obadiah, were like balm of Gilead to the broken-hearted Israelites, as they sat by the waters of Babylon and wept.

EZEKIEL AT HIS ZENITH

THE fall of Jerusalem, for four centuries the impregnable and almost inviolate capital of Jewry, and the wholesale uprooting of the Jews from the land they had made their own for nearly a thousand years, might well have seemed the end. But Ezekiel was the last man to cry Ichabod!

Nothing is more remarkable in all Hebrew prophecy than the tremendous uplift of faith and courage with which he almost immediately adjusted himself to the new situation.

At first the destruction of the Temple, and the realization that now by no possibility could he ever set eyes on its dear stones again, filled the heart of the priest-prophet with despair. Moreover, the blow fell at a time when the heart of Ezekiel the man was bursting with grief over the

¹ Obadiah 17 21.

mortal illness of his beloved wife, even then lying on her death-bed in the little house by the river Chebar. Nothing but the direct voice of God could save his faith in the face of such disasters. And it came: *The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down. Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead.*¹ Let those who speak of the "inhumanity" of Ezekiel read again this touching passage: *Thus shall Ezekiel be unto you a sign.*²

The fulfilment of Ezekiel's prophecies regarding the fall, and the undaunted courage with which he rallied his fellow-countrymen to survive it, now gave him a prestige and influence amongst the exiles which he had hitherto been denied. Half the blame for Jerusalem's sin, he declared, must fall upon her leaders. *They were scattered, because there was no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field.*³ But henceforth God Himself shall be the Shepherd of Israel, scattered though they be. *For thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I myself, even I, will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock, . . . so will I seek out my sheep.*⁴ It is passages like this which make us realize what the scholars mean when they say that Ezekiel is "the vital link between the Old Testament and the New." It is the tenderness of the Good Shepherd Himself to the sheep that was lost.

Already, before the dust has settled over the shattered walls of Zion, he foresees the gathering together of his flock. *I will bring them out from*

¹ 24¹⁵. ² 24²⁴. ³ 34⁵ (Matt. 9³⁶). ⁴ 34¹¹.

*the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land ; and I will feed them upon the mountains of Israel. . . . I myself will feed my sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord GOD.*¹ One far-off day, in His own good time, God will uplift His mighty hand and outstretched arm. The world shall tremble and obey. Little by little a glorious kingdom of God on earth shapes itself in his mind, a kind of Millennium or Utopia, where Jehovah and His people shall reign from Mount Zion. We have the beginnings here of that type of prophecy, far-flung beyond the most distant historical horizon, which is termed Apocalyptic, and which we shall meet more frequently in the post-exilic writers.

In the meantime, the prophet refuses, with a fine flame of courage, to despair or even to let the world perceive his grief over the destruction of the Temple and the loss of his heart's desire. We find him, in the years that followed this catastrophe, already planning a New Jerusalem which should infinitely transcend the old. It is at this period of his life (585-572 B.C.) that the true greatness of the man is revealed.

The fall of Jerusalem might very easily have meant the death of Judaism, both as a national and as a spiritual force. Nebuchadrezzar in fact designed no less: by depriving the vanquished of their sacred sites, their ancient objects of veneration, and their familiar surroundings, the Babylonians, like the Assyrians before them, hoped to disintegrate at one blow their victims' sense of racial and religious unity so dangerous to the peace of the empire. In many cases those whole-

sale transportations did in fact achieve their object. The fate of the northern Israelites after the fall of Samaria is a case in point: on their exile to Assyria we simply lose sight of them, and people of an enquiring mind are still asking, What became of the "lost ten tribes"?

That the other two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, were not equally lost is due chiefly under the Divine providence to the prophet Ezekiel. It is not too much to say that he saved the life of Judaism, and made possible its glorious resurrection in Christianity. The description of the Babylonian exile given in the *Book of Daniel*, though written at a much later date, gives in many respects a true picture of the perils and temptations which beset the Jews at this time, and if the best of them were delivered from the burning fiery furnace of idolatry and the lion's den of king-worship, it was the unfaltering witness of Ezekiel that saved them.

It would be difficult to overestimate the power of these temptations. Imagine the first impression which great Babylon must have made upon the weary travellers as they entered by the beautiful Ishtar Gate, and, treading the broad pavement of the Processional Way, craned their necks now at the lofty Etemenanki (Tower of Babel), now at the incredible Hanging Gardens which Nebuchadrezzar had built for his hill-country bride. Here, where all the finest artistry, the richest treasure, and the noblest literature of thrice a thousand years had made their home, the vaunted magnificence of poor far-off Jerusalem must have paled into insignificance. It were well if the God of Jerusalem, too, did not dwindle in the shadow of

those stupendous shrines of Marduk, Nebo, and Bel.

Even as this shameful thought hovered in the air, suddenly with a fanfare of trumpets and all kinds of music a splendid procession appeared at the head of the street, led by the king in person, with a multitude of gorgeously apparelled priests and prancing horses drawing the sacred boat that held the golden image of divine Marduk himself. What a contrast to the meagre simplicity of the rites of Jehovah! When all the world was kneeling in the plain of Dura, it seemed almost churlish to remain standing!

Moreover, the Babylonians were not unsubtle proselytizers. They treated their unwilling guests with disarming indulgence, but it was no accident that settled them on the banks of the Chebar within view of the ancient holy city of Nippur and its world-famous Temple of Bel. To many of the Jews it must have seemed that the substance of so very great a temple was preferable to the shadow of a Temple lying in heaps beyond the desert. To some it may even have seemed that Jehovah had been worsted, that Nebo, Ishtar, Tammuz and the Sun were at least worth a trial. After all, they would argue in their primitive way, Jehovah's home is in Palestine: here we are in the territory of the gods of Chaldæa. *How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?*¹

If anyone could teach them how to do that, it was the prophet Ezekiel. To him the destruction of Jerusalem, far from proving that Jehovah had been worsted, afforded the most infallible evidence of His invincible omnipotence. Was it not pre-

¹ Psalm 137⁴ (P.B.).

cisely for her sins against the holiness of God that Zion had been destroyed? *Then shall they know that I am the LORD, when I have made the land a desolation and an astonishment, because of all their abominations which they have committed.*¹ As to the gods of the heathen, the day will soon come when Jehovah will turn in His wrath upon the nations, and their gods shall be utterly powerless to save them. *Because ye have borne the shame of the heathen: therefore thus saith the Lord GOD: I have lifted up my hand, saying, Surely the heathen that are round about you, they shall bear their shame,*² . . . *and the nations shall know that I am the LORD, saith the Lord GOD.*³ Among the most vigorous and picturesque passages of Ezekiel are his polemics against Egypt and Tyre.

But the kernel of Ezekiel's message to the exiles is his assurance of the ultimate remission of their sins. The vision of the Valley of Dry Bones is one of the most familiar in the Old Testament, a wonderful parable of life after death. *Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off. Therefore prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and . . . I will bring you into the land of Israel, and I will put my spirit in you, and ye shall live.*⁴ Grievous though the sins of Israel had been, they were not too great for God to forgive: He had chastened them, but He would not utterly slay. *As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.*⁵ Over and over again Ezekiel assures his conscience-stricken hearers that repentance can wash away their guilt. *None of his*

¹ 33²⁹.² 36⁷.³ 36²³.⁴ 37¹¹.⁵ 33¹¹.

*sins that he hath committed shall be remembered against him : he hath done that which is lawful and right ; he shall surely live.*¹ . . . *When the wicked turneth from his wickedness, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby.*²

Thus Ezekiel's vision of the restoration is far from merely nationalistic. It includes an actual return to the soil of Palestine, but its essence is a spiritual return to holiness. Over and over again he recalls Jeremiah's haunting prophecy of the New Covenant:³ *A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you : and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.*⁴

Yet Ezekiel is equally sure that God's forgiveness will take the practical form of restoring the exiles to their homes in Palestine. His certainty on this point is all the more remarkable in that there was nothing on the political horizon at this time to point in that direction. Nebuchadrezzar was at the height of his power ; Jehoiachin still in prison ; no shadow of decline menaced the prestige or affected the foreign policy of Babylon. Yet Ezekiel's vision of the coming restoration never flickered for an instant. *O mountains of Israel, . . . I will cause you to be inhabited after your former estate, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings.*⁵ . . . *And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers.*⁶ . . . *And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden.*⁷ In this golden future there shall be no unhappy divisions amongst the

¹ 33¹⁶.² 33¹⁹.³ Jeremiah 31³¹.⁴ 36²⁶.⁵ 36¹¹.⁶ 36²⁹.⁷ 36³⁵.

children of Abraham: the northern and the southern kingdoms, Ephraim and Judah, shall be united at last, *and I will make them one nation in the land, . . . and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more.*¹ His prophecies even include the figure of a Messianic Saviour or Prince of the ancient lineage of David. *I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David. . . . And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David prince among them.*²

A very specific aspect of this New Jerusalem was Ezekiel's insistence upon the building of a second Temple of actual wood and stone which should be the outward and visible sign of Israel's return to God. The news that his beloved Temple of Solomon had been destroyed came at first as a shattering blow: but soon he perceived what a wonderful opportunity God had given His people of rebuilding it nearer to the heart's desire. Long hours must he have spent in the absorbing task of designing a new Temple which should so far surpass the Temple of Solomon as Israel's glorious future should transcend her past.

In the last few chapters of his Book we can still read the description, complete with architectural details and measurements, of an edifice to whose planning he had brought all the imagination of the artist, the vision of the prophet, and the expert knowledge of the trained priest. *In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel.*³ . . . *And he brought me to the temple, and measured the posts.*⁴ . . . *And he said unto me, This is the most holy place.*⁵ . . . *And the spirit took me up, and*

¹ 37²².² 34²³.³ 40².⁴ 41¹.⁵ 41⁴.

*brought me into the inner court ; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of my throne, and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel for ever.*¹

These last chapters of Ezekiel, with their curious alternation of matter-of-fact specifications, minute rubrical directions, and momentary gleams of passionate anticipation, will not appeal very strongly to the modern reader, but they must have made a profound impression upon the exiles. Here was the promise of a Sanctuary infinitely more beautiful and majestic than the heathen temples which tantalized them every day. The elaborate ritual of Marduk would one day appear but paltry 'bowing and scraping' in comparison with the dignified and significant ceremonies of Israel. It was well worth while planning this Temple in the air: *Thou, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities : and let them measure the pattern. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known unto them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, . . . and all the ordinances thereof, and all the laws thereof, and write them in their sight.*²

Nearly seventeen years were to pass before the children of Israel, once more restored to their own land, had a chance of putting this plan into execution. That the Temple of Haggai and Zechariah should fulfil Ezekiel's ideal to the letter was an impossibility in those impoverished days, but the standard had been set, and Ezekiel's careful regulations as to the ministers of the Temple, and

¹ 43⁵.

² 43¹⁰.

the sacrificial rites within it, became with a few modifications the actual ritual pattern for later Judaism. It was Ezekiel who first distinguished the Levites from the priests, and limited the latter to the family of Zadok. By adopting and expanding the principles of the Law of Holiness, he laid the foundation of the later laws of ceremonial purification. And it was largely due to him that all traces of paganism were for ever eradicated from the liturgy of the Temple. By a prevision more wonderful than any mere forecast of events he foresaw the essential part which a strictly regulated and uniform system of corporate worship would play in the adolescence of the new Judaism.

But perhaps the most outstanding result of Ezekiel's work was one of which the Scriptures say nothing yet reveal much. We may be sure that a prophet of so marked a literary temperament would not content himself with writing merely the forty-eight chapters of the Book which bears his name. The highly charged literary atmosphere of Chaldæa was not without its effect upon the exiles, and we may be sure that Ezekiel would give every encouragement to those ardent students and writers amongst his countrymen who occupied their enforced idleness in completing the records of the past.

The Deuteronomic school of writers had long been busy in writing up the history of Israel from the prophetic point of view. They now continued the work of revising the Pentateuch and bringing the later records up to date. Their last entry in the *Book of Kings* mentions the release of Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach about 560 B.C., a date

which probably marks within five years or so the passing of the prophet Ezekiel himself. He may possibly, therefore, have held in his hands the greater part of the Pentateuch, Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings much as we have those volumes to-day.

But in one important respect he must have felt that the Pentateuch fell short of his ideal. It was called "The Law," yet it was woefully lacking in precisely the type of law which he felt that Israel needed in these latter days. It was inadequate, in effect, on the liturgical and ritual side. We have already seen how the "Law of Holiness" was added, doubtless under Ezekiel's influence, to the Pentateuch, where it is included within the *Book of Leviticus*. But the movement did not stop there. A new school of sacred writers now arose, intent on following up Ezekiel's train of thought and, like him, representing rather the priestly than the prophetic point of view. Little by little, during the Exile and after it, they added an entirely fresh element to the Pentateuch (in particular), an element so distinctive in its style, vocabulary, and outlook that it can readily be disentangled from the older portions of the Scriptures, and is called the "Priestly Code."

Among the special features of this new literary vein we may recognize at once a special interest in the ritual of the Temple and its ministrants; an architectural scaffolding of precise dates, enumeration, and stereotyped verbal girders holding the narrative together; and last, but most picturesque and valuable of all, an adaptation of current Babylonian legend and primeval history to the requirements of the Jewish faith. To give but

one example: the Babylonian story of Creation was prefixed, with variations, to the *Book of Genesis* in so wonderful a manner that it remains to this day one of the most moving statements of the unity and omnipotence of God, while it gives at the same time a deeply spiritual motive for the observance of that Sabbath day of rest upon which Ezekiel had always set such store.

As to the fulfilment of his confident prophecies concerning the restoration of Israel from the Babylonian captivity, it would seem that Ezekiel, like Moses, attained no more than a Pisgah view of the Promised Land. There is nothing in his Book to show that he outlived Nebuchadrezzar, who died in 562 B.C., or that he had the happiness of seeing Jehoiachin released from his thirty-seven-year-long captivity in 560 B.C., when *Evil-Merodach king of Babylon . . . spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon.*¹ But in any case this act of clemency proved a false dawn, and Ezekiel was spared the misery of seeing hope deferred almost beyond human endurance in the long dark night which was yet to precede the true rising of the Sun with healing in his wings.

¹ 2 Kings 25²⁷.

CHRONOLOGY OF EZEKIEL AND OBADIAH

B.C.

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623. ? Birth of Ezekiel. JOSIAH, King of Judah.
 621. Reforms of Josiah (*Deuteronomy*).
Prophecies of Jeremiah and Zephaniah.
 616. Nabopolassar attacks Nineveh.
Prophecies of Nahum.
 612. Fall of Nineveh.
 607. Josiah killed by Pharaoh Necho.
607. JEHOAHAZ (Shallum), King of Judah.
 Jehoahaz taken captive to Egypt.
607. JEHOIAKIM (Eliakim), King of Judah.
 ? Date of *Obadiah* ¹⁻⁵, quoted *Jeremiah*, 49 ¹⁴⁻¹⁶.
 605. Battle of Carchemish.
 Egypt and Assyria defeated by Babylon.
 604. Nebuchadrezzar, King of Babylon.
Prophecy of Habakkuk.
600. Jehoiakim rebels against Babylon.
 598. Nebuchadrezzar attacks Jerusalem.
 Death of Jehoiakim.
597. JEHOIACHIN (Jeconiah, Coniah), King of Judah.
 Surrender of Jerusalem.
 Ezekiel carried off to Babylon.
 First year of the Captivity of Ezekiel.
597. ZEDEKIAH, King of Judah.
 First exiles in Tel-Abib.
596. Jeremiah's letter to Tel-Abib.
 594. Zedekiah visits Babylon from Jerusalem.
 592. Fifth year of the Captivity.
 Ezekiel's Call (July).
Ezekiel 1-7.
591. Sixth year of the Captivity.
Ezekiel 8-19.
590. Seventh year of the Captivity.
Ezekiel 20-23.
588. Ninth year of the Captivity.
 Zedekiah rebels against Babylon.
 Ezekiel's wife dies.
 Nebuchadrezzar attacks Jerusalem.
Ezekiel 24.

B.C.

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586. Eleventh year of the Captivity.
Fall of Jerusalem.
Ezekiel 25-29¹⁶; 30, 31.
585. Twelfth year of the Captivity.
Exiles arrive in Babylon.
Ezekiel 32-39.
- GEDALIAH, Governor in Mizpah.
Edomites, etc., exult over fallen Jerusalem.
Prophecy of Obadiah.
584. Jeremiah and remnant flee to Egypt.
Ezekiel and Priestly Schools busy in exile,
writing up the Scriptures.
572. Twenty-fifth year of Exile.
Ezekiel 40-48.
570. Twenty-seventh year of Exile.
Ezekiel 29¹⁷ ff.
565. ? Death of Ezekiel.
562. Death of Nebuchadrezzar.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND ISAIAH, HAGGAI, AND ZECHARIAH

THE curtain now rises on the closing act of the Babylonian Exile: scene, the Jewish settlement at Tel-Abib by the river Chebar ; time, about the middle of the sixth century B.C. The events which led to the deportation of the Jews from Palestine are now remembered only by the older members of the community. Forty odd years have passed since the first surrender of Jerusalem in 597 B.C., when the advance guard of exiles, including the prophet Ezekiel and the deposed King Jehoiachin, were driven hither across the Syrian desert. The final fall of the Holy City ten years later and its ruthless destruction by Nebuchadrezzar (586 B.C.) now seem very long ago, and the majority of the captives have no personal recollection whatever of the splendours of Solomon's Temple or the hallowed sites of Zion.

By the year 560 B.C., with which our story opens, nearly all human links with the Jerusalem of the monarchy were broken. The last two kings of Judah, Zedekiah and Jehoiachin, lay buried (probably) in a foreign grave beneath the shadow of some Babylonian ziggurat. Jeremiah by the Nile, Ezekiel by the mud flats of the Chebar, had suffered a like fate. A whole generation had grown up who had to confess that in a physical sense Chaldæa was their native land: they had been born and bred in Babylon.

Among such, probably, was the prophet whom we know, unfortunately, only as the "Second Isaiah." The sweetest and most Christ-like of all the prophets of Israel, the haunting echo of whose voice is more than any other heard in the Gospel story and repeated in the immemorial liturgies of the Church, the man to whom God first hinted at the "one perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," wrought by the cross of pain—it is unfortunate indeed that he must remain for ever no more than just a voice. Of the man as a human being—and of course he must have been of flesh and blood like ourselves—we know nothing at all. His very name, the scholars assure us, has been lost.

Even his wonderful prophecies are difficult to find. They are collected together in no single book, like those of the other prophets, and only the fact of their quite inimitable character, or what we call their "internal evidence," enables us to sift them out from the mass of material bound up within the so-called *Book of Isaiah* in our Old Testament. What a debt of gratitude the world would owe to the courageous scholar who, without pettifogging equivocations, should re-edit and reprint that *Book of Isaiah*, arranging the displaced sections in their proper order, and showing which were written by the First Isaiah (744-700 B.C.), which by the Second Isaiah (550-536 B.C.), and which by a third prophet of about 450 B.C.! For the present we can only refer the reader to the table in our appendix, where he will find that roughly speaking the prophecies of the Second Isaiah, with whom we are now dealing,

are to be found in *Isaiah* 40-55, though not without scattered fragments within the earlier chapters.

The usual explanation of this confusion is, first, that the "Second Isaiah" necessarily remained anonymous, owing to the danger of preaching sedition, as he did, under the very windows of a panicky and suspicious Babylonian king; and secondly, that his writings were tacked on to the prophecies of the historic or "First" Isaiah because otherwise that volume would have been too short in comparison with Jeremiah or Ezekiel. A simpler suggestion, which we give for what it is worth, is that the exilic prophet's name really was Isaiah (The Lord is my Salvation), and that this accounts for much. Let us call him Isaiah, at any rate, for the duration of the chapter.

Of his birth and upbringing we know nothing, but may surmise a little. Born probably in Babylonia somewhere about the year 590 B.C., he must have been a well-grown youth by the time of Ezekiel's death in 565 B.C., and may well have seen and heard that architect of Israel's future building his temples in the air. There was little of the priestly temperament in Isaiah—the only altars he knew were those of Marduk and the gods of Babylon—but he would quickly catch fire from the light in the aged prophet's eyes, and dream with him of the New Jerusalem that should one day be restored.

That the boy was well instructed in the principles of Judaism we may be certain. In the prophetic and priestly schools of Babylon countless unnamed elders brought up the young in the way they should go. Only by assuming an intense enthusiasm for education among the Jews

of the captivity can we explain the extraordinary tenacity with which they clung to their past, maintained their exclusive sense of nationality, and kept themselves (on the whole) unspotted from the heathen world. Perhaps more scrupulously than ever before, the distinctive rites of Jewry were preached and practised—circumcision, the Sabbath, special commemorative feasts and fasts, the taboos of ceremonial purity, the careful preservation of family pedigrees and traditions. Though the actual Temple and its sacrifices were missing, the atmosphere of Temple worship was recaptured in many little chapels or “synagogues” throughout the land, and it is probable that more people “went to church” than ever before.

Within these synagogues something of the old Temple music was still heard; psalms ancient and modern were sung; Sabbath by Sabbath old men and maidens, young men and children, heard the Hebrew Scriptures read aloud and expounded in their ears. Thus, in the midst of an Aramaic-speaking generation, they were never allowed to forget the language of their forefathers.

By this time the sacred Scriptures, though their development was to continue for at least another couple of centuries, were becoming recognizably “The Law and the Prophets” as known in the time of Christ. So that Isaiah and his contemporaries had already a Holy Bible to instruct and confirm them in the faith. In the absence of a Temple and a country of their own, the Jews were already becoming “the people of a Book.” But it was a Book that was not yet closed to new writers, and some of its most moving

pages were to be added by the young Isaiah himself.

The occasion of his call to prophesy arose from a sudden and complete reversal of fortune which seems to have befallen the exiles soon after the thirty-eighth year of their captivity (560 B.C.).

Up to that time they had been treated not inconsiderately by their Chaldæan masters. The community in Tel-Abib had been allowed much freedom, both civil and religious, and in the course of years had achieved even a certain material prosperity. Jeremiah had written from Jerusalem advising them to settle down, and to "pray for the peace" of Babylon. In all the writings of Ezekiel there is no word of complaint about ill-treatment, nor reproof of King Nebuchadrezzar.

There is indeed a curious parallel, taking it by and large, between the Exile in Babylon and the sojourn in Egypt twelve centuries earlier. At first the tribes of Jacob in Goshen had been well treated by their Hyksos hosts, as were the companions of Ezekiel in Tel-Abib. The promotion of Joseph to high honour by the Pharaoh corresponds to a curious episode in the thirty-seventh year of the Exile (561 B.C.): Nebuchadrezzar having died in the previous year, Evil-Merodach, his successor, released King Jehoiachin from his long imprisonment, and "set his throne above the throne of the other kings that were with him in Babylon."¹ No doubt the hopes of the exiles rose high at this unexpected act of clemency. What could it mean but a change of policy towards the captives, and the imminent approach of their restoration?

¹ 2 Kings 25²⁷.

But alas! Evil-Merodach was assassinated the very next year (560 B.C.) by the usurper Nergal-Sharezzer (Neriglissor), and immediately all hopes were dashed to the ground. In Neriglissor the Jews had found once more a "king who knew not Joseph": the flesh-pots of Chebar were exchanged for the taskmasters and the hard service of a latter-day "affliction." Whatever the reason—suspicion, jealousy, the sheer necessity for unlimited supplies of labour in the face of external pressure—a series of petty tyrants oppressed the Jews to such an extent that the memory of their previous comfort, as in the case of the Egyptian sojourn, became almost entirely obliterated. Neriglissor was succeeded in 556 B.C. by Labashi-Merodach; he in 554 B.C. by Nabonidus and his favourite son, the prince-regent Belshazzar. The huge empire of Babylon was tottering to its fall, and the exiles were the first to feel the pinch.

Very naturally the tone of the Jewish writers towards Babylon now changes completely. The Isaiah of the Exile speaks of the "hard service wherein Israel was made to serve," and the king of Babylon, like Pharaoh of old, is now called "the oppressor."¹ The prophet no longer spares him as Ezekiel spared Nebuchadrezzar: *I was wroth with my people . . . and gave them into thine hand: thou didst show them no mercy; upon the aged hast thou very heavily laid thy yoke. . . . Therefore shall evil come upon thee.*² The psalms composed at this time are full of sorrow and pain: *By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept: when we remembered thee, O Zion.*³ It is probable that the psalm of sorrow which Christ remembered

¹ 14³.² 47⁶¹¹.³ Psalm 137¹ (P.B.).

in His agony was composed in those dreadful days, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*¹

Year after year, for twenty years or more, the exiles drained the dregs of bitterness, until there were many who could remember nothing else: *I am in misery, and like unto him that is at the point to die: even from my youth up thy terrors have I suffered with a troubled mind.*² The persecution became a veritable pogrom: to be a Jew was to be a marked man, despised, rejected, tormented, robbed, his race reviled, his religion laughed to scorn. *All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out their lips, and shake their heads, saying, He trusted in God, that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, if he will have him.*³ Almost he was tempted to despair.

What the exiles needed in those dark days was clearly another Moses to give them back their national faith, unity, pride. And this is what, in his own way and according to the needs of his own generation, the Second Isaiah was called upon to do.

Long had he meditated on the intolerable purgatory of his fellow-exiles. What could be the meaning of it all? Ezekiel had warned Israel only too clearly of the punishment which must precede the remission of her sins, but surely this endless torment was more than she deserved. She was not the greatest nor the only sinner among the nations. Why, it was almost as though Israel were bearing the burden of the whole world's sins upon her back, and one were paying the price for all.

Perhaps she was! Perhaps after all that was

¹ Psalm 22¹ (P.B.) (Matt. 27⁴⁶). ² Psalm 88¹⁵ (P.B.).

³ Psalm 22⁷ (P.B.) (Matt. 27^{39f}).

her special privilege and mission upon earth, to suffer on all humanity's behalf and so to reconcile the world to God. It was a strange and striking thought, presumptuous almost, that mere man could be of such incalculable service at once to God and to his fellow-men, yet a thought which once admitted seemed to explain so much.

Little by little was revealed to Isaiah the infinitely comforting doctrine of Israel as the chosen Servant of the Lord, suffering for the sins of man. Here, he perceived, was the real inner meaning of the propitiatory sacrifices upon which Ezekiel had laid such stress: the priestly offering was a symbol of the spiritual oblation whereby Israel should make atonement to the holiness of God. The slaughter of the lamb was but a sacrament: the inward and spiritual grace was the willing sacrifice of self.

With this light in the darkness, every torment became a joy, since it sealed the choice of God upon His Servant, and manifested him to the world, no longer as the very scorn of men (to those who had eyes to see), but as the Saviour of mankind. *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; my chosen, in whom my soul delighteth. . . . I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thy hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.*¹

Thus in the four beautiful "Servant Poems," full at once of pathos and of pride, Isaiah works out his teaching of the Suffering Servant of the Lord. We can see him slowly but surely groping

his way, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, towards an understanding of the redemptive value of suffering, of the saving power of the Cross. Gradually the personality of the Servant is narrowed down, as it were, to an ideal epitome of Man. First it is captive Israel as a whole; then the faithful minority among the exiles; finally the quintessential Israel summed up in that most wonderful and most loved passage of all the Old Testament, the fifty-third chapter of *Isaiah*, which tells of the *man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief*.¹

Who can ever forget the haunting phrases of that exquisite poem, so unconsciously yet so exactly anticipating the Passion of our Lord? *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. . . . As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before her shearers is dumb; yea, he opened not his mouth. . . . He poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.*²

As these prophetic poems were privately circulated among the dejected exiles, broken in heart and body, spirits began to rise again, faith in God was renewed, the crown of thorns became a royal diadem, and the best of the Jews, in their dim Old Testament way, took up once more their burden, and with the light of triumph in their eyes became obedient even unto death.

The *Book of Daniel*, though written four centuries later, gives an idealized picture of the sufferings of those latter years of the Exile, and

¹ 53³.

² 53^{5 ff.}

possibly preserves some actual memories of it. We know from the inscriptions discovered within the past century that the lions' den and the burning fiery furnace were no figments of the imagination. That the name of Daniel was held in high honour for judgement and righteousness we learn not only from the references to him in Ezekiel, but from the recently discovered Ras Shamra Tablets. And the cuneiform records have established the truth of the statement that Belshazzar, not Nabonidus his father, was the actual regent in Babylon at the time of its fall.

Above all, the *Book of Daniel* preserves a true tradition of the religious atmosphere of the Exile, with its magicians, enchanter, interpreters of dreams, the magnificence of its heathen idols, and its ruthless pressure upon all men to bow down before the gods of Babylon. There was every temptation to give way, but Isaiah, like Ezekiel before him, held the Jews to their covenant with Jehovah as the one and only true God. He roundly declared that the so-called gods of Babylon were really no gods at all, but merely lifeless, powerless, meaningless sticks and stones masquerading as divinities. To worship such man-made effigies was as ridiculous as it was sinful. The Godhead had no rivals. There was but One God, Jehovah, the God of all the peoples of the earth. *I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God. . . . Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no Rock; I know not any.*¹ In a famous passage Isaiah laughs out of court the man who thinks he can create God out of a piece of wood, warming his hands before a fire made of the shav-

ings of the so-called "God," and crying, *Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.*¹

Thus Isaiah becomes, in a sense, the Moses of the Exile, recalling his countrymen from the contamination of Chaldæa to the sole obedience of the great I AM, and pointing them to the prophecies of deliverance now surely on the eve of fulfilment.

Fifty years of the "seventy" foretold by Jeremiah had now passed, when in 547 B.C. came the first definite break in the clouds. Far away in the east among the fabled mountains of Persia strange events were taking place. The bazaars and caravanserais of Babylon were full of whispered rumours—the old order was changing, the age-long balance of power on the point of being upset; the kingdom of Media on the further frontiers of Chaldæa was shuddering before the impact of a new and powerful enemy; already (so it was said) there were anxious faces and much fluttering in the dovecot of the Babylonian court. Prince Belshazzar was frightened. There were stories of sinister omens, of a mysterious writing on the wall.²

In a flash of prophetic insight Isaiah saw at once that here at last came the promised deliverance of Israel on its way. Riding on the full flood-tide of prophecy, he bursts the gates of sorrow with his joyous cry, *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished.*³ God is satisfied that Israel has at last paid the full price of sin: *I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions.*⁴ Now let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered! He has raised

¹ 44¹⁶.

² Daniel 5.

³ 40¹.

⁴ 43²⁵.

up a Deliverer from afar, conquering and to conquer Israel's foes. He *hath raised up one from the east, . . . he giveth nations before him, . . . he giveth them as the dust to his sword, as the driven stubble to his bow.*¹ Soon it shall be the turn of Babylon to bite the dust: already in a vision Isaiah sees the oppressor laid low. *How art thou fallen from heaven, O day star, son of the morning !*² Let the exiles lift up their heads once more, and make ready for the day of triumph and release: *Prepare ye in the wilderness the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a high way for our God.*³

The lesson of past suffering is never to be forgotten, however. Within the happier prophecies which now pour forth from his lips, Isaiah sets the old "Servant Poems" at significant intervals, like thorns amid the roses. But henceforth they are sounding in a new context, a pæan of joy and triumph in the coming deliverance. The word of the Lord has gone forth, *that saith of Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited; and of the cities of Judah, They shall be built, . . . and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid.*⁴ It is easy to imagine how welcome after all those years of despair must have been this exultant cry: *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.*⁵

As time went on the rumours gained in volume and detail. It was now known that a certain Cyrus, king of the petty principality of Anshan, had revolted against his overlord Astyages, king of Media. He had gained some initial successes. He had won a decisive victory. Cyrus was actu-

¹ 41².
⁴ 44^{26, 28}.

² 14¹².

³ 40³ (Matt. 3³ etc.).

⁵ 52⁷ (Rom. 10¹⁵).

ally king of the Medes and Persians. He was pointing his troops the road to Babylon. By the year 547 B.C. his forces were thundering towards the west: *I have raised up one from the north, and he is come; from the rising of the sun one that calleth upon my name.*¹

It was natural that the exiles should idealize their deliverer. From the first, Isaiah was convinced that Cyrus had been appointed as the human instrument of Jehovah's purpose. He was certain that this foreign potentate, though baffled in his first onslaught against Babylon, would ultimately win, for God had chosen and thus in a sense "anointed" him to be the saviour of His people, the shepherd of His scattered flock. *Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him. . . . For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel my chosen, I have called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou hast not known me. . . . I will gird thee, though thou hast not known me.*² There are passages, indeed, which almost seem to claim for Cyrus a conscious realization of his divine mission, a belief in Israel's God. He was a Gentile, it is true, but a Gentile with a difference. Of all the heathen, the Persians most nearly approached to the conception of God as One and as Spirit: there was much in the Zoroastrianism of Cyrus with which a Jew might sympathize.

The history of the next few years is well known through the famous inscription on the Cylinder of Cyrus, where he gives his own account of the capture of Babylon in 538 B.C. The subjugation of the ancient city was complete. Its uncon-

¹ 41²⁵

² 45¹⁴

ditional surrender was followed by the execution of Belshazzar and the suppression of the reigning dynasty: Cyrus, the king of the Medes and Persians, was now king of Babylon too, and the forecasts of many prophets of Israel, culminating in those of Isaiah, had been amply fulfilled. *Come down, and sit in the dust, O virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, O daughter of the Chaldeans: for . . . thou shalt no more be called The lady of kingdoms.*¹ Henceforth Babylon is but a provincial town in the vast Persian empire which stretches from the Indus to the Nile, and has its capital in Susa, "Shushan the Palace."

In one respect, however, the prophecies were happily *not* fulfilled. Far from "dashing the children of Babylon against the stones,"² Cyrus displayed more than his accustomed clemency. How different from the bloodthirsty spirit of his Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors is that revealed by the Cylinder of Cyrus: "My vast army marched in the streets of Babylon peacefully. I had care for the inhabitants of Babylon. I comforted their sighing, I did away with their distress, . . . the gods dwelling (among the exiled peoples) I returned to their homes." Such is the conqueror's honourable boast, and it finds its echo in the jubilant song of Isaiah: *The LORD hath comforted Zion: he hath comforted all her waste places, and hath made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.*³ Already in his mind's eye he sees Jerusalem rebuilt, Ezekiel's dream Temple

¹ 47¹.² Psalm 137⁹.³ 51³.

rising stone by stone, the sins of Israel for ever forgotten. The Exile is over: the restoration but a matter of time. *For a small moment have I forsaken thee ; but with great mercies will I gather thee.*¹

Perhaps the latest prophecy of the Exile, as Isaiah sat with the decree of Cyrus in his hand, watching the happy tumult of his countrymen loading the camels and filling the water-pots for their westward trek, was that wonderful song of hope in the highest, which even now, after twenty-five centuries, we cannot hear without a thrill: *The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad ; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . . The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion ; and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads : they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*²

That Isaiah himself ever set eyes on the Promised Land is more than doubtful. The opening chapters of the *Book of Ezra* tell the story of the Exodus from Babylon in much detail, including the mention by name of many priests and prophets who shared in the work of restoration. But it is impossible to detect the figure of the "Second Isaiah" among them. Perhaps, like Moses, old age had overtaken him on the eve of the fulfilment of his hopes, and we leave him on the Pisgah of some Chaldæan house-top watching the tail of that exultant caravan disappearing in the west. He was not the only Jew to be left behind: there were many, lukewarm in spirit or too successful in business, who refused to leave a city where prospects under the new management were so promising. It may well be that Isaiah's prophecy

¹ 54⁷.

² 35^{1,10}.

of the end of the Suffering Servant was literally fulfilled in himself: *They made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death ; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*¹

HAGGAI

THE decree of Cyrus must have satisfied the most ardent expectations of such exiles as remained true to the teaching of Ezekiel and the Second Isaiah. The Persian conqueror not only gave them full permission to return to Judah as soon as they wished, but restored to them the sacred vessels which Nebuchadrezzar had taken from the Temple, and otherwise gave them very material assistance towards the success of their enterprise.

Naturally it took a little time to make the necessary preparations, but at length, in the year 536 B.C., just sixty-one years after the commencement of the Exile, the homeward march began. At the head of the caravan rode a prince of the royal house of David, one Sheshbazzar or Zerubabel, chosen by the Jews, but invested by Cyrus with the authority of a Persian governor (tirshatha). At his side went a young man of the priestly family of Zadok, Joshua son of one Jozadak who had actually served in the old Temple in Jerusalem. Some thousands of their fellow-countrymen, riding on camels, or asses, or in covered wagons, and protected by out-riders from the Persian army, made up the happy throng, as they traversed once more the route marked out by their forefather Abraham some fifteen

centuries earlier, from the city of the Chaldees to the land of Canaan.

Arrived in Judah, old memories of the conquest a thousand years earlier must have crossed their minds. A happy omen must have seemed the name of their leader Joshua, as he sent them to occupy the towns of Jericho, Ai, Beth-el and the rest.¹ Every stick and stone of the country of which they had read so much, but seen nothing at all, reminded them of the glorious story of Israel's past. Here was Bethlehem, the city of David; here Anathoth, home of Jeremiah; here Ramah, with its bitter associations now all changed to joy. And here, above all, was the Jerusalem of their dreams, desolate indeed—they had expected that—but still set high on the indestructible hill of Zion, still beautiful, in its wide prospects so unlike anything they had seen in the featureless flats of Babylon, and still (above all) the place where the Lord had chosen to build His house.

The first duty on arrival was obviously to return thanks for their safe deliverance. At a great gathering of all the people on Mount Moriah a temporary altar was built, and, with the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, the offering of the daily sacrifice so long perforce suspended was renewed. Now at last had come the opportunity to carry into practice the elaborate ritual of the Pentateuch, *as it is written in the Law of Moses the man of God*,² revised and interpreted by the priestly schools of the Exile. Never had so marvellous a Feast of Tabernacles been seen in the city of the Lord.

And then without delay the actual building of

¹ Ezra 2.

² Ezra 3².

the Temple was begun. Offerings of money and service poured in. Skilled workmen were summoned from Tyre and Sidon, as in the days of Solomon. In the second month of the year 535 B.C. the foundation stones were laid, to the sound of joyous music and of psalms. *O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is gracious : and his mercy endureth for ever.*¹ The joy of the people was almost too great for them to bear. But while the younger onlookers laughed and sang, there were old men whose sobs could not be restrained. Sixty years earlier they had seen the first Temple in all its beauty, and now, please God, they were soon to see a second Temple even more beautiful: it seemed too good to be true.²

But alas ! few indeed of those old men were ever to see the completion of that Temple so joyously begun in the first flush of the restoration. The outline of the foundations had scarcely been laid when interference came from an unexpected quarter. On the borders of Judah lay the Persian province of Samaria, once the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. It will be remembered that, on its fall in 722 B.C., Sargon had transported the ten tribes to Assyria, while Esar-haddon had colonized the depopulated territory with a mixture of foreign nationals. Finding themselves in a land long regarded as the territory of Jehovah, they had adopted Him as their chief Deity, and now actually regarded themselves as co-religionists with the returned exiles. These Samaritans now offered to assist in the rebuilding of the Temple. Not unnaturally the Jews refused. They had earned the right, through suffering, to

¹ Psalm 136 ¹ (P.B.).

² Ezra 3 ¹¹.

look upon themselves as alone the Israel of the Covenant; while, from the racial point of view, the Samaritans were a mongrel crowd—they could not even speak Hebrew properly! Their offer of help, therefore, was contemptuously refused.¹

The Samaritans countered by preventing the building altogether, both by active violence and by taking legal advice in the local courts. Possibly an appeal to Cyrus would have restored the Jews to their rights, but to tell the sad truth, their interests too easily became diverted from the Temple. The land, after all, was in a dreadful state: fields and vineyards desolate, cattle grievously undernourished, bandits everywhere, and an extreme shortage of houses. Many of the Jews felt that it would be time to think about the Temple when they had found a roof over their own heads and reasonable prospects of a livelihood. So very quickly the first enthusiasm of the restoration flickered away: the Temple remained a mere outline in the soil. And thus it continued for fifteen disappointing years—for the residue of the reign of Cyrus, for the whole of the reigns of Cambyzes (529-522 B.C.) and Gaumata the usurper (522-521 B.C.), and until the second year of Darius I. (Hystaspes).

The accession of Darius was marked by the suppression of wide-spread revolts which had recently torn the empire asunder. We can still read for ourselves on that stupendous monument, the Rock of Behistun in Persia, how the new king crushed his enemies. Incidentally, it was the decipherment of this inscription which unlocked for us the vast library of the Assyrian and Baby-

¹ Ezra 4.

lonian cuneiform records. Perhaps it was the new sense of security pervading the empire which now rekindled the zeal of the Jews in Palestine, and gave the prophet Haggai his opportunity.

Of the personal history of Haggai nothing is known before or after the year 520 B.C., during which the whole of his extant prophecies were uttered. It is probable that he was born in Babylon, and one of that circle of scribes who, under the influence of Ezekiel, co-operated with the priests in formulating the rubrics of the Law. He was not himself, however, a priest: the authority with which he spoke came entirely from his prophetic vocation.

In the year 520 B.C., then, "in the sixth month" (like Ezekiel, he is precise about his dates), Haggai boldly rebuked Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the High Priest for their long inaction, and for the selfish worldliness of the Jews. *Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your cieled houses, while this house lieth waste?*¹ he cried, pointing to the grass-grown Temple site. No wonder they complained of poverty and misfortune: what more could they expect, when the house of God lay so neglected? *Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little. Why? saith the LORD of Hosts. Because of mine house that lieth waste.*²

It was the authentic tone of prophecy, an apparition from the past. Not for seventy years had a genuine prophet of Israel lifted up his voice in the land of Judah. So moving was the summons of Haggai that within three weeks the whole atmosphere changed: conscience awoke from its

long torpor, enthusiasm burst into flame. Under the energetic leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua the work of rebuilding the Temple was begun, with Haggai constantly at hand to whip them on, saying, *I am with you, saith the LORD.*¹

In the following month we find him reassuring those whose spirits flagged at the prospect of the long and expensive toil before them, and were inclined to contrast the new erection with the splendid Temple of the past. *Who is left among you that saw this house in its former glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the LORD, and work: for I am with you.*² . . . *The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the LORD of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former.*³

The words of Haggai so fired the builders that there was henceforth no question of their enthusiasm. But now a new difficulty arose, or rather an old one revived. The suspicions implanted in the minds of the local authorities by the Samaritans fifteen years earlier were stirred to life again, and Tattenai the Persian governor began to raise objections: *Who gave you a decree to build this house?*⁴

But this time the Jews were not to be intimidated. The presence of Haggai the prophet made all the difference. Zerubbabel and Joshua felt that they were acting under Divine orders, and the threats of the Persian were courageously defied. Moreover, just at the crucial moment, yet another and an even greater prophet rushed into the breach.

¹ I 13.² 2 3.³ 2 8.⁴ Ezra 5 3.

ZECHARIAH

FOR now the prophet Haggai, hitherto fighting a lone hand, found that he had made an unexpected convert. Among the men of priestly lineage who watched the House of the Lord growing like a mushroom on its long-desolate site, we are to picture one Zechariah, the son of Berechiah the priest. Saturated with the teaching of Ezekiel, the young man is full of interest as he sees the plans of the Master, in their main features at any rate, taking shape before his eyes. His excitement increases as he foresees the day not far distant when it will be possible to restore the Temple ritual in all its beauty and magnificence, and when he himself will be called upon to take his share in the service of the sanctuary.

But Zechariah is more than a priest: in his veins flows the blood of Iddo, his grandfather, a prophet. Suddenly in the eighth month of the year 520 B.C., when Haggai has already been hard at work for two months, Zechariah also hears the call and flies to the support of his brother prophet. His accession added just the last touch that was needed to confirm the resolution of his countrymen. Zerubbabel and Joshua challenged the Persian Tattenai to stop them in their building. Let him send to Babylon, and he would find that the restoration of the Temple had been fully authorized by his superiors. Meanwhile the work should go on. Henceforward the two prophets Haggai and Zechariah go down in history as the men who inspired and forwarded the building of the second Temple.

We may read the message of Zechariah still in the first eight chapters (only) of the Book that bears his name.

He opens with a vigorous attack upon those who deny that the authentic voice of prophecy may still be heard in the land: *The prophets, do they live for ever?*¹ They do, he cries: they prophesy against you here and now, even as the prophets of old cried shame upon the sins of your fathers. *But be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets cried, saying, . . . Return ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings : but they did not hear.*²

It was just the support that the older prophet needed. A week or two later Haggai lifts up his voice again, in the last recorded utterance in his little Book. It is a burst of ecstatic confidence in the future of Israel. The work of the Temple goes steadily on: nothing can stop it now. Soon it will be filled with the sweet smoke of sacrifice, and the wondrous Golden Age promised by the seers of old time shall come to pass. *In that day, saith the LORD of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel, saith the LORD, and will make thee as a signet : for I have chosen thee, saith the LORD of hosts.*³ Thus Haggai salutes in Zerubbabel the true spirit of the Messianic Prince who shall build the Temple of the New Jerusalem. With this glimpse at a Divine consummation lying above and beyond this present world, the message of Haggai, having achieved its purpose, sinks into silence, and we hear of him no more.

Shortly afterwards despatches arrived from

¹ I 6.

² I 4.

³ Haggai 2 23.

Babylon in answer to the Tattenai's enquiries. Search had been made in the library at Ecbatana (Achmetha) in Media, and the decree of Cyrus had been found which authorized the return of the Jews and the restoration of their Temple.¹ King Darius now issued a fresh decree. Not only must the Tattenai refrain from impeding the work, but state aid must be given in money, material, and even beasts for the altar, that the Jews might *offer sacrifices of sweet savour unto the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.*² The Persian governor had indeed been hoist with his own petard!

But there is a great deal of work still to be done on the building, and Zechariah continues to stand by with encouragement and assurance of the Divine approval.

His next utterance is dated in the eleventh month (that is, the spring of 519 B.C.). His message is now and from henceforward couched in that distinctive style which we call "apocalyptic," so different from anything found in the prophets of the eighth or seventh centuries. In those days the prophet preached well within the framework of historic circumstance; the foes he denounced were human foes and known by name; the future he foretold was to be expected in his own generation or not far beyond; his hopes were fixed on this ordinary work-a-day world. In the prophets of the sixth century, however, we find that the experiences of the Exile and its aftermath have sown the seeds of disillusion. The fulfilment of the promise is so long deferred, the horizon so continually receding, that the prophetic vision leaps

¹ Ezra 6.

² Ezra 6¹⁰.

over the tedious centuries of the immediate future into a distant world beyond the world, a life beyond life, where all shall be set right. Already in Ezekiel and the Second Isaiah we found a tendency to such far-flung "apocalyptic" visions. In Zechariah the tendency has become a rooted characteristic.

It was inevitable that apocalyptic prophecy should develop a vocabulary of its own. Where the future is projected beyond the limits of actuality, the only way to describe it is in metaphor or allegory. The enraptured visionary, finding that language is altogether too earth-bound to express his wondrous dreams, can only convey his meaning by a series of word-pictures, loading the canvas with colours and intricate mass-effects of light and shade, hoping that the cumulative effect will convey something to his readers of the ineffable visions that run riot in his mind. Were we to pursue the story of the later apocalyptic writings (the *Similitudes of Enoch*, the *Assumption of Moses*, and the rest), we should find their ecstasies taking more and more fantastic form, till they seem to lose themselves in a labyrinth of empty words. Such of the Apocalypses as are included in the Bible, however, are of less elaborate, more sober type—the *Book of Daniel*, for instance, and the *Revelation of St. John*. Comparatively simple, too, are the visions of the prophet Zechariah.

His first vision is typical, that of the Four Horsemen of the Lord. *I saw in the night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in the bottom; and behind him there were horses, red, sorrel, and white.*

*Then said I, O my lord, what are these ?*¹ The answer is given by a character new to prophetic writings, though henceforth to become familiar. The older prophets felt no need of an intermediary between God and man: He spake to them direct. But now a growing sense of the Divine transcendence perceives the presence of God's agents and messengers, the Angels. *And the angel that talked with me said unto me, . . . These are they whom the LORD hath sent to walk to and fro through the earth.* The Four Horsemen, in fact, are God's vedettes, scouring the earth to see what men are doing to bring about the Kingdom of Righteousness, and in particular to find out if the Temple was a-building. *I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies ; my house shall be built in it, saith the LORD of hosts.*²

There follow seven other visions of a similar nature, Four Horns, a Man with a Measuring Line, the Seven-branched Candlestick of the Temple, the Flying Roll of Writing, the Woman in the Ephah, the Four Chariots, and the vision of Joshua the High Priest standing before the Judgement Throne of God. This last vision is of special interest, perhaps, since it introduces for the first time in Biblical literature the person of Satan. Satan is here no more than the angel whose duty it is to act as what we may call the prosecuting counsel. Zechariah sees Joshua standing before the Tribunal, *and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary.*³ But the Lord has mercy on Joshua, provided that he duly tends the Temple and maintains its rites: *thou also shalt judge my house, and shalt also keep my courts.*⁴ The com-

¹ I 8.² I 16.³ 3 1.⁴ 3 7.

pletion of the Temple is continually in Zechariah's mind, as the necessary preliminary to the coming Golden Age. *The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it.*¹

Once or twice the prophet comes to earth with a brief but interesting historical note. He mentions, for instance, a visit paid to Jerusalem by some Jewish well-wishers from Babylon, where it will be remembered that a considerable number of the exiles had preferred to remain. By this time they had lost all sense of sin for what had once been regarded as disloyalty, and henceforward the dispersion of the Jews in various centres is taken as an accepted and not dishonourable fact. The community in Babylon had doubtless heard, through the Tattenai's negotiations with King Darius, that the building of the Temple in Jerusalem was proceeding apace; and they now send envoys to Joshua the High Priest with a generous donation towards the expenses. Zechariah takes of their silver and gold sufficient to make crowns, which he inscribes with the names of the donors, and promises to hang a memorial of them in the Temple of the Lord. He also makes a crown for Joshua, in whom he discerns a prototype of the "Branch" foretold by Jeremiah: *and he shall build the temple of the LORD: even he shall build the temple of the LORD.*²

As the walls rise ever upward, and the noble edifice begins to take recognizable shape, the prophecies of Zechariah soar to their most jubilant heights: *There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his*

¹ 4⁹.² 6¹².

staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. Thus saith the LORD of hosts.

At last, none but the finishing touches remain to be added. The Temple is a fact. The promises of God have been fulfilled. In a little while the building will be dedicated to its holy use, and the Golden Age will have begun. He thinks of all the long ages of mingled tragedy and triumph which have gone to the making of his nation, of the many prophets who have foretold this Divine consummation of the hope of Israel, and of how they would have rejoiced to see this day. Not all at once, perhaps, but very surely now the better times will come, when "the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea," and the peoples of the world shall turn to Mount Zion for salvation and for peace. *In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, shall even take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.*¹

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

SECOND ISAIAH, HAGGAI, AND ZECHARIAH

B.C.

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597. NEBUCHADREZZAR, King of Babylon.
Surrender of Jerusalem. First batch of exiles taken
to Babylon with Ezekiel.
590. ? Birth of Second Isaiah.
586. Fall of Jerusalem. Main body of exiles.
Ezekiel prophesies in Babylon.
570. Ezekiel's last prophecy.
562. Death of Nebuchadrezzar.
- EVIL-MERODACH, King of Babylon.
561. Releases Jehoiachin from prison.
Evil-Merodach killed.
560. NERGAL-SHAREZER, King of Babylon.
Oppression of the exiles begins.
556. LABASHI-MERODACH, King of Babylon.
554. NABONIDUS, King of Babylon.
Oppression intensifies.
550. ? Second Isaiah begins to prophesy.
The Servant Poems :
Isaiah 42 ¹⁻⁴; *49* ¹⁻⁶; *50* ⁴⁻⁹; *52* ¹³⁻⁵³ ¹².
549. Cyrus of Anshan conquers Astyages of Media.
Isaiah 12, 13; 14 ¹⁻²³.
- ? Birth of Haggai and Zechariah in Babylon.
Belshazzar prince-regent in Babylon.
547. Cyrus advances upon Babylon, but driven off.
Now King of the Medes and Persians.
Isaiah 19 ¹⁻¹⁸; *21, 23*.
545. Growing menace of Cyrus. Decline of Babylon.
Isaiah 40, 41; 42 ⁵-end; *43*.
542. Campaign of Cyrus against Babylon.
Isaiah 44-48.
538. Fall of Babylon.
CYRUS, King of Persia.
Isaiah 49 ⁷-end; *50* ^{1-3, 10}-end; *51; 54, 55*.

B.C.

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537. Decree of Restoration.
Isaiah 52¹⁻¹³.
- ? Death of Second Isaiah.
536. Return of the Jews to Jerusalem:
 With Haggai and Zechariah:
 Under Zerubbabel and Joshua.
 Foundations of Temple laid but abandoned.
 Gap in Jewish history of 15 years.
529. Death of Cyrus.
- CAMBYSES, King of Persia.
522. DARIUS I. (Hystaspes), King of Persia.
 Suppresses revolt of Gaumata.
520. Call of Haggai. He appeals for Temple building.
 Sixth Month. *Haggai 1.*
 Seventh Month. *Haggai 2¹⁻⁹.*
 Eighth Month. Call of Zechariah. He supports
 Haggai in his appeal. *Zechariah 1¹⁻⁶.*
 Ninth Month. *Haggai 2¹⁰-end.*
519. Eleventh Month. *Zechariah 1^{7-6¹⁵}.*
 Visit with gifts from Babylonian Jews. *Zechariah*
6⁹-end.
598. Ninth month. Temple well in hand.
Zechariah 7, 8.
516. The Temple completed, 70 years after its fall.
 Ceremonies of Dedication and great Passover.
 Further Jewish history a blank for 70 years.
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CHAPTER IX

MALACHI, THE THIRD ISAIAH, JONAH, AND JOEL

WITH the dawn of the fifth century before Christ the star of Israel seemed to have reached its zenith. In 536 B.C. the Jews had been delivered by Cyrus King of Persia from the long agony of the Exile in Babylon, and now once more were happily settled in their own home land. Jerusalem, so long a desolate ruin, had become the centre of a thriving population. The ancient monarchy of the house of David, it is true, had never been restored, and national independence had ceased to be a matter of practical politics, but under the tolerant rule of Persia the Jews were allowed considerable civil and religious freedom.

Above all, the rebuilding of the Temple of Jehovah was an achievement of which the Jews were justly proud. It had been effected at much cost in money and service, in the face of poverty, initial indifference, and hostile opposition. The memory of the three exciting years (520-516 B.C.) during which the Temple had been slowly but steadily erected was still fresh. The great prophets Haggai and Zechariah were probably yet alive in Jerusalem, to be pointed out to the rising generation as the men who had built the House of the Lord, and the thrill with which the authentic voice of prophecy had been heard once more in the land of Elijah and Elisha was yet remembered.

From the spiritual point of view, no link was missing in the chain which bound the Jews of the Restoration to their glorious past. The house of David, though no longer reigning, had been recognized (in Zerubbabel) by the Persian king, and its descendants still carefully preserved the line. The tribe of Levi and the sons of Zadok still provided priests and ministers for the Temple courts. Many of the better families in the city could trace their descent from well-known forefathers of pre-exilic times.

Most treasured heirloom of all were the sacred Scriptures of Israel. Admittedly, there was nothing in the world of literature to compare with the priceless rolls of "The Law and the Prophets," nothing in the realm of religion to approach them in inspiration or moral force. If the Jews had been the People of a Book and nothing else, such a Book as this would have exalted them over the heads of all the peoples of the earth, and approved them as the chosen of the Lord.

And this, although the Old Testament had not yet attained its final form, had far from passed the growing age. The Pentateuch, or "Law of Moses," still lacked the finishing touches of the Priestly school which Ezra a century later was to supply. The "Roll of the Prophets," though containing most of the historical records up to the beginning of the Exile, and including most of the greater Writing Prophets of the past, was still short of its full complement; while that third Roll, which was afterwards called the "Writings," probably contained as yet little more than the *Book of Psalms*. But the latter, that wondrous hymn

book of the Second Temple, was enough in itself to send the blood of every Jew racing in his veins.

In short, though we have no explicit record of the period, we may well believe that the generation which saw the building of the Restoration Temple was one of the happiest and proudest of Jewish history. Providentially, there was little to fear from external interference. The Persian government, though strong enough to preserve the peace in Palestine, had its hands full with the war with Greece. The battle of Marathon (490 B.C.) diverted the eye of every statesman towards the new world of Europe. When Xerxes came to the throne in 485 B.C. a complaint of Jewish presumption made to the court in Susa received little attention,¹ and the defeat of the Great King at Thermopylæ and Salamis (480 B.C.) probably served to confirm the Jews in their ambitious dreams.

Of the course of Jewish history during the reign of Xerxes (Ahasuerus) we have practically no contemporary record, but it is possible that the *Book of Esther*, though written very much later, preserves a ray or two of light. It is certain that Susa, like many other cities of the empire, contained its Jewish quarter, that the Jews were not always on the best of terms with their neighbours, and that already they were noted as a nation within the nations which refused to become absorbed. Through the dispersion in Susa, Babylon, and Egypt, the knowledge of the Lord was indeed beginning to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, with Zion as its fountain head.

Thus at the beginning of the fifth century the

¹ Ezra 4⁶.

fairest visions of the prophets seemed to have been fulfilled, and the promises of God to have come true. The very silence of prophet and historian speaks eloquently of joy and peace. The Golden Age had dawned; it only remained to see what the noonday should bring forth.

MALACHI

THE first hint of trouble came in the reign of Artaxerxes I., who succeeded Xerxes in 465 B.C. Greek enterprise at this time was endeavouring to detach Egypt from the Persian empire, and the Great King could no longer afford to neglect his communications through Palestine. He now awoke suddenly to the fact that Jerusalem was quietly re-arming, and rebuilding her fortified walls with a view apparently to political independence. *They are building the rebellious and bad city,*¹ he was told by Samaritan informers, and an immediate stop was put to the design.

In spite of the fact that the great historian Herodotus visited Syria and the east about this time, the only light thrown upon Jewish history for the next twenty years is from the writings of the prophets Malachi and the "Third Isaiah," who must be assigned to this period.

A sudden cloud has now fallen on the scene. The revolts which followed the death of Xerxes have evidently broken the long *Pax Persica* in Palestine, so that Judah is surrounded once more with active enemies. The hostility of the Samaritans, which has dogged the efforts of the Jews ever since their restoration, continues with undiminished

¹ Ezra 4¹².

bitterness. We hear also of aggression by the Ammonites and Arabian tribes. And Edom, whose malicious exultation over the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. was so sternly denounced by the prophets of that day, is still conspicuous among the enemies of Zion. Malachi's prophecies, indeed, open with an oracle against Edom: *The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.*¹

But Malachi is concerned not so much with the evil-doing of Israel's natural enemies—that was to be expected—as with the wrong done by one Israelite to another within the blood brotherhood of Jewry. *Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother?*² Peace and prosperity have been abused as usual: the Law of the God Who gave them has been broken yet once again.

The particular social evil against which Malachi inveighs is that fungus of every luxurious age, easy and promiscuous divorce. The Jews were making a habit of putting away their wives in order to marry the attractive foreign women who were flooding into their cosmopolitan city. The exotic charm of some fair Egyptian's painted face, the sensuous dancing of some Persian houri, had induced many to break their marriage vows for the sake of *the daughter of a strange god*. Malachi will have none of this. The Lord will answer no prayers of men unfaithful to their wives. *The LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously, though she is thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant.*³

1 I 4.

2 2 10.

3 2 14.

Not that all foreigners were in themselves evil; far from it. There was much in the Gentile that the Jew of these degenerate days might well imitate. Malachi strikes a new note here, the authentic note of what we call Universalism, that catholic conception of the Kingdom of God which, transcending all racial or national boundaries, confesses that God hath made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and would gather them all into the one flock. The spirituality and monotheism of the Persian religion, Zoroastrianism, had indeed made a tremendous impression upon the Jews. The Lord of all the earth had evidently revealed Himself, dimly perhaps but truly, to others besides the Chosen People, and the universal fact of religion argued a universal glimpse of the Divine. *For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name is great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense is offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name is great among the Gentiles, saith the LORD of hosts.*¹

Would it were so with every Israelite, who with his lips confesses Jehovah to be his Father and his Lord! *If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name.*² Barely seventy years had the Temple been built, yet already the sacrifices are skimped, the services slovenly and ill performed, the priests neglectful and ignorant of the Law. *Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar, . . . ye offer the lame and the sick. . . . Ye say also, Behold, what a weariness is it!*³ The House of Prayer has become a den of thieves, cries the prophet.

¹ I 11.² I 6.³ I 7, 13.

*Will a man rob God? yet ye rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with the curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation.*¹

There comes a day of retribution when they that have done evil shall go into everlasting fire. *Behold, the day cometh, it burneth as a furnace; and all the proud, and all that work wickedness, shall be stubble.*² But to them that have done good, it shall be a day of gladness and rejoicing: *Unto you that fear my name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.*³ In the meantime, let those who would escape the Judgement be steadfast in their obedience to the voice of God as revealed in the Law and the Prophets.

Malachi ends on a lightning flash of foresight. Before the coming of that day the world shall have a last chance to learn the way of righteousness. A Prophet greater than all the prophets shall arise, a second Elijah summing up in Himself all the teachers of the past. *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.*⁴ Hundreds of years later this prophecy was called to mind, when men were faced with the portent of John Baptist and our Lord.

Of the person of Malachi the prophet we know nothing—probably not even his real name, for “Malachi” may be simply a title signifying the Angel or Messenger of God.

¹ 3⁸.² 4¹.³ 4².⁴ 4⁵.

THE THIRD ISAIAH

OF the true name of the other great prophet of this period we are equally ignorant. We call him the "Third Isaiah," simply because his writings are appended to the *Book of Isaiah* (chapters 56-66). Nothing whatever is known about his life, and even the date of his prophecy is fixed only by the general consensus of conjecture—a remark, to be quite candid, which applies to all the prophets dealt with in this chapter.¹

Whether accidentally or not, however, there is a curious parallelism both of language, style and subject-matter between the writings of the "Third Isaiah" and his great predecessor, the "Second Isaiah" of the Exile. The condition of affairs in Judah at the middle of the fifth century B.C. was only too painfully reminiscent of that in Babylon at the middle of the sixth. The work of Malachi had proved largely ineffectual, and the Jews were groaning under a new kind of bondage. If the affliction in Egypt had been bitter, the Exile in Babylon worse, there were aspects in which the present captivity within Jerusalem itself was worst of all.

For it was an entirely unnecessary, self-imposed captivity—a bondage under sin. True, the Persian overlords were obstructive, and the surrounding nations—Edom, Samaria, and the rest—made their hostility continually felt. But the real sting of it lay in the fact that though Jerusalem was once more inhabited, though the Temple stood as proudly as of old upon the ancient site,

¹ We follow, for the most part, Oesterley and Robinson's *Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (1934).

though the Priesthood and the sacrifices had been restored, though in fact the promises of the prophets of old time had been fulfilled, yet alas! the wickedness of man had made the promises of God of none effect. The Golden Age seemed further away than ever!

The "Third Isaiah," therefore, like his predecessor, proclaims the coming of a far-off divine event which shall release Israel from her bonds. To his own generation he too cries, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people!" *The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, . . . to comfort all that mourn.*¹

As to the manner of the release, the restoration of Jerusalem is not yet complete. The cry is now not for a Temple but for *walls*; as long as the Holy City continues without walls, so long will she remain a prey to her enemies, a centre of distraction and alarm. Here again we find special denunciation of hostile Edom: *Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?*² The Second Isaiah had foretold the building of the Temple: the "Third Isaiah" foretells the building of the walls; and as the former prophet had looked for help to Cyrus the Great King, so the latter places his trust in Nehemiah, the cup-bearer of the King. *Thou shalt be called The repairer of the breach.*³ . . . he cries to Nehemiah (not by name, however), and to Jerusalem, *Strangers shall build up thy walls, and*

¹ 61¹ (Luke 4¹⁸).

² 63¹.

³ 58¹².

their kings shall minister unto thee. . . . Thy gates also shall be open continually ; they shall not be shut day nor night ; that men may bring unto thee the wealth of the nations.¹ . . . Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.²

In his broad-minded universalism, the "Third Isaiah" accepts the hint of Malachi and advances upon it. The Gentiles not only seek after God if haply they may find Him, but they shall be welcomed into the full fellowship of faithful Israel. Already a number of proselytes have been permitted to "join themselves unto the Lord,"³ and the prophet reassures them as to their position. No strangers shall be repulsed who *love the name of the LORD, to be his servants.*⁴ Each and all who keep the Law of Moses shall be entitled to enter the Temple: *even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer . . . for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all peoples.*⁵ A wonderful anticipation here of the words of the Good Shepherd: "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring." *The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside his own that are gathered.*⁶

In the meantime, however, the sheep are going very far astray. In stern phrases which remind one over and over again of the great eighth-century prophets and of Jeremiah, the "Third Isaiah" denounces the hypocrisy, idolatry, and moral corruption of his day. The priests are as neglectful and ignorant as in the days of Malachi: *His watchmen are blind, they are all without know-*

¹ 60¹⁰² 60¹⁸.³ 56³.⁴ 56⁶.⁵ 56⁷.⁶ 56⁸.

ledge ; they are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark.¹ . . . The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart.² Sins of immorality are as rife as in the days of Manasseh: they inflame themselves among the oaks, under every green tree.³ Murder and violence and insensate luxury go hand in hand with hypocritical sacrifices and empty prayers. The voices of Amos and Hosea rise from the grave: *Is such the fast that I have chosen? the day for a man to afflict his soul? . . . Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bonds of wickedness? . . . Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him?*⁴

The prophet ends on a note of exultation, as the news comes from Susa that a deliverer, Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah, is on his way to the city of his forefathers. Once more the indomitable Voice of Prophecy salutes the Dawn of the Golden Age. *Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee*⁵ . . . comes the promise of deliverance to Jerusalem. *The LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. . . . And all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet; and they shall call thee The city of the LORD, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.*⁶

Imperceptibly the spirit of the prophet soars beyond the confines of the present world into an apocalyptic vision of the great Day when God shall be all in all. *The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light*

¹ 56 ¹⁰.

⁴ 58 ⁵.

² 57 ¹.

⁵ 60 ¹.

³ 57 ⁵.

⁶ 60 ^{2, 14}.

*unto thee : but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory.*¹ . . . *For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth : and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.*²

The story of how Nehemiah and Ezra fulfilled, in a measure, the hopes of the "Third Isaiah" is told in the Books known by their names. Unfortunately the ancient documents underlying the narrative have been disarranged by the fourth-century editor, and the correct sequence of events obscured.

According to the general opinion of modern scholars, Nehemiah *preceded* Ezra. Having obtained permission from Artaxerxes, he travelled to Jerusalem in 445 B.C., and found the city much as Malachi and the "Third Isaiah" had described it.³ He immediately started to rebuild the walls, though hindered from the outset by the Samaritans under the leadership of Sanballat. When the walls were but half completed, a determined effort was made to destroy them, and the Jews had to form into two bands, the one proceeding with the work, the other mounting guard under arms, while Nehemiah supervised them with a bugler close at hand.⁴ Sanballat persisted in his hostility, attempts being made upon the life of Nehemiah, but the walls were at length successfully completed in 444 B.C. A great service of Dedication and Thanksgiving was then held to celebrate the achievement.⁵

Nehemiah, with the authority of a Persian governor conferred upon him, next set himself to

¹ 60 ¹⁹.

² 65 ¹⁷.

³ Nehemiah I, 2.

⁴ Nehemiah 4.

⁵ Nehemiah 12.

redress the abuses of which he had heard so much while still in Shushan the Palace. The poorer sort of the people, whose small-holdings had been heavily mortgaged, and children sold into slavery, found in the new governor a sympathetic and resourceful friend—during his term of office he refused to accept from them even the customary salary of the post. At the end of twelve years he returned to Susa, leaving his brother Hanani in charge.

But he soon paid a second visit to Judah (430 B.C.). On this occasion he found that certain evils had broken out again during his absence. One of the rooms in the Temple had actually been converted into a private house by the High Priest Eliashib, and the Levites had been deprived of their rightful offerings. Nehemiah speedily summoned the offenders to an interview “and set them in their place.”¹ *Remember me, O my God, concerning this, he writes, and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for the observances thereof.*²

Included among Nehemiah's reforms was an insistence upon the rigid observance of the Sabbath, and a prohibition of those mixed marriages which had called down the wrath of Malachi. *Remember me, O my God, for good*³ are the pathetic concluding words of the personal memoir embodied in his Book.

We now pass into a dark tunnel thirty years long, during which the Scriptures cast no light whatever upon Jewish history. A tiny ray, however, is thrown by the remarkable Aramaic papyri

¹ Nehemiah 13¹¹.

² Nehemiah 13¹⁴.

³ Nehemiah 13³¹.

recently discovered at Elephantine on the Upper Nile. Artaxerxes I. had been succeeded in 424 B.C. by Darius II., when the most important of these documents were written. They show that here in Elephantine lived a colony of Jews who had built for themselves a Temple of Jehovah at least a century earlier. In 408 B.C. that Temple had been destroyed by the native Egyptians, and now a letter was sent to Johanan, High Priest in Jerusalem, asking for assistance towards its restoration.

The appeal being ignored by the priests, the Elephantine colonists thereupon directed their appeal to Bagoas, Persian governor of Judah, and to the sons of Sanballat, governor of Samaria, who appear to have sent a favourable reply. There the correspondence ends. Many strange facts emerge from these papyri with which we have not space to deal—it is only a backwater of Jewish history in any case—but two curious points will strike the reader at once: (1) The Jews in this far-off Egyptian colony had completely ignored the Deuteronomic regulation that in Jerusalem alone could there be a lawful Temple of Jehovah; and (2) there must have been a period of at least fifteen years (530 B.C. to 516 B.C.) when the Temple in Elephantine was the only existing Temple of Jehovah in the world!

Darius II. was succeeded in 404 B.C. by Artaxerxes II., and now once more we make contact with scriptural history. For in the seventh year of this very Artaxerxes (so the scholars tell us), namely in 398 B.C., the great scribe and lawyer Ezra paid his epoch-making visit to Jerusalem.

During the dark period mentioned above we

are to picture the Jewish community in Babylon now grown enormously not only in power and numbers but in religious zeal. Though shrinking from actual residence in Judah, like many a Jew of our own day they nevertheless clung with a passionate loyalty to their national faith, and especially to their sacred Scriptures. The environment in which they lived was immemorially cultured. There is much in Babylonian literature akin to the *Book of Job* and of *Proverbs*, which may well have been written at this time.

Above all, the Jewish priestly schools in Babylon which had survived the restoration had been building up, and had now almost finally completed, that remarkable addendum to the Pentateuch known as the "Priestly Code." In other words, the five Books of the Law of Moses had now, in distant Babylonia, reached their final form. All that remained was to introduce this completed edition of the Law to the Jews of Jerusalem.

To effect this, Ezra in 398 B.C. obtained leave from Artaxerxes II. and set out for the Holy Land, *for Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgements.*¹ By a special decree of the Persian king, several of his fellow-countrymen accompanied him, together with a large contribution in money from those who remained in Babylon. The king even made a levy on the state treasury, in order that everything might be done *to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem.*² Once more the records show that the sympathy with which the Jews regarded the religion of Persia was fully reciprocated on the other side.

¹ Ezra 7¹⁰.

² Ezra 7²⁷.

Arrived in the city, Ezra at once summoned a general assembly of all the people, and read aloud to them from the Book of the Law which he had brought with him. Most of the facts should have been well known to his hearers, but they were put in so novel and impressive a manner that the assembly wept aloud to realize how grossly they had broken their covenant with God; and when the passage in *Leviticus* was reached ordaining the Feast of Tabernacles,¹ they adjourned in order to observe it with unprecedented devotion. A new era had begun, reminding one very closely of the reforms of Josiah two centuries earlier. Everything possible was done to purify Jerusalem of transgressions against the Law of Moses, and a New Beginning was sealed by the making of a solemn league and covenant with God. Henceforward the name of Ezra the Scribe stands head and shoulders above all others in the Rabbinic schools of Jewry, even unto this day.

In one respect the ideals of Ezra seem, at first sight, to have marked a step backwards from those of Malachi and the Third Isaiah. It will be remembered how in their large-hearted universalistic way those great prophets of the Second Temple had welcomed the inclusion of foreigners within the pale of Judaism, and had even contrasted the spirituality of many of the Gentiles with the worldliness of the Jew. Had this line of development been followed up by their successors, Judaism might have become sooner than it did one of the great missionary religions of the world.

The reforms of Nehemiah and Ezra, however,

¹ Leviticus 23 ³³.

had moved in a different direction altogether. Not unnaturally, they represented a throw-back to the Exile, where only the most narrowly exclusive views of Israel's unique prerogative had saved Judaism from submersion in the ocean of heathendom. In Babylon and in Susa the Jewish communities had retained their national faith only by keeping themselves strictly "to themselves," and anything like a policy of intermarriage with the foreigner, of hospitality to foreign adherents, or of "broad-mindedness" with regard to foreign religions, would have been fatal.

Ezra's policy in Jerusalem, therefore, was one of separation and exclusiveness. Where it was a question of preserving the pure blood of Judah, he was a veritable Nazi in reverse, horrified at the thought of Nordic contamination. When he heard that "the holy seed had mingled themselves with the peoples of the lands," . . . *he rent his garment and his mantle, and plucked off the hair of his head and of his beard, and sat down astonished; he was ashamed and blushed to lift up his face to God.*¹ One of his most drastic reforms, in fact, was to put away all foreign wives and the children born of them, according to the Law of Moses. He would have no truck with the Gentiles.²

And this remained for centuries the characteristic attitude of Judaism to the outside world. It was "the enmity," "the middle wall of partition," which was only finally abolished in the flesh of Christ.³

¹ Ezra 9^{3, 6}.

² Ezra 10³.

³ Ephesians 2¹⁴.

JONAH

THERE was at least one pre-Christian Jew, however, who protested against this rigid point of view.

The teaching of the unnamed prophet who most of all put forward the claims of the Gentile world to a place in the sun of God's love is ascribed to the prophet "Jonah son of Amittai." The reasons for this particular ascription are not very clear. Actually, Jonah the son of Amittai, a native of Gath-Hepher in Galilee, lived during the reign of Jeroboam II. of Israel (c. 773 B.C.), in the days when Assyria was first swimming as a new planet into the ken of Palestine.¹ There may have been some basis for the later traditions which associated him with Nineveh, for such traditions, known as Midrash, were a familiar feature of post-exilic literature, and gathered around the names of many great characters of the Old Testament.

The author of this short but pregnant prophecy, the *Book of Jonah*, throws his teaching into the form of an allegory or parable describing an episode in the life of Jonah. The prophet was bidden by the Lord to *Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.*² But he loathed the task. What were the people of Nineveh to him, a Jew? Why should he brave the terrors of travel for the sake of a Gentile city? Furthermore, there was always a risk that the wretched city might repent at the last moment and be saved. God was notoriously forgiving, and there was no knowing

¹ See page 32.

² I².

what blessings He might heap on the head of Nineveh, should the prophet be so unfortunate as to succeed in his mission. He would be party to no such un-Jewish and ridiculous altruism. So *Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD,*¹ sailing due west for Spain instead of eastward to Assyria.

The story of his shipwreck and adventure in the belly of the great fish is one of the best known in the Old Testament. It is of course in the nature of a Midrash, the theme of which was not uncommon in the ancient east—very early seals have been found in Egypt, depicting a man being vomited from the mouth of a huge fish on to the dry land. As far as natural history is concerned, such an occurrence is not impossible. The descriptions of writers like Frank Bullen prove conclusively that in the cachalot whale the sea does in fact contain a monster which could easily swallow a man without injuring him. But the author of the *Book of Jonah* would have been aghast at the thought of his readers so literally pressing the details of his parable.

The real point is that no one, however far he goes by sea or land, can escape from the presence of the Lord; and that no depths of sin and darkness are too deep for God to seek and save. Jonah's psalm of thanksgiving for his deliverance shows clearly this interpretation of his experiences: *Out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*² . . . *The waters compassed me about, even to the soul; the deep was round about me, . . . yet hast thou brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God. . . . Salvation is of the LORD.*³

¹ I³.² 2².³ 2⁵, 9.

So Jonah went to Nineveh after all, and preached to them of sin and repentance and the goodness of the Lord. And it all turned out as he knew it would. Nineveh repented, and God forgave them!

Jonah was furiously angry. Was not this exactly what he had feared? *Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country?* That was the very reason why he had sailed for Tarshish: *I knew that thou art a gracious God, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repentest thee of the evil.*¹ And now the Gentile city was laughing for joy and gladness. Jonah was so angry he wanted to die!

But God gently chides him for his jealous, exclusive spirit. *Doest thou well to be angry?*² He asks. And now comes another parable. This time Jonah is sitting over against Nineveh, protected by the branches of a spreading gourd-tree, whose broad leaves afford a grateful shade from the blazing Mesopotamian sun. *So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd.*³ But when he went to seek it the next day he found it had been attacked by a blight, its brave green foliage withered in disease and death; and he was sick at heart for the stricken tree.

At once God points the parable: *Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; . . . and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city?*⁴ There is a wonderful implication here, a thought so novel it must have taken away the breath of any ordinary Jew of the period. Could the prophet really mean that God, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, had "laboured" for a heathen

¹ 4².² 4⁴.³ 4⁶.⁴ 4¹⁰.

city like Nineveh, and "made it grow"? This was indeed a strange extension of the uncovenanted mercies of God!

Yet a re-reading of the parable made it clear that such was certainly the writer's plea. God was a Father of the Gentiles: He cared for their conversion: His sending to them a preacher proved that He believed them to be *capable* of conversion. Like as a father pitieth his children, so He "had pity on Nineveh, that great city," with its innocent Little Ones, its *more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand*.¹ A blatant appeal to sentiment this—calling up a picture of the nurseries of Nineveh filled with little blue-eyed baby Gentiles too young to die for the sins of any "Bloody City." Rank humanitarianism! Why, the man even puts in a word for the dumb animals of Nineveh—and *also much cattle*, he adds, as though the slaughter of a few cows and sheep could deter the Almighty from destroying such a hot-bed of heathendom, even as He had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah of old!

So must have protested many an orthodox Jew, brought up to believe the chosen people to have a unique prerogative in the loving-kindness of the Lord. Indeed, it would almost seem as though the prophet himself began to feel that he had gone too far when he found himself speaking of kindness to animals! At any rate, here, on the mention of "much cattle," the little *Book of Jonah* comes to a full stop, impressively abrupt. We hear no more about "Jonah," but we know that he has learnt his great lesson—that "God is no respecter of

persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him."¹

Under the picturesque Oriental robe of Jonah, then, we find the most missionary-hearted of all the Old Testament prophets. His meaning does not leap to the eye of the superficial reader, but those who take the trouble to find it will discover that in the story of "Jonah and the Whale" the highest altitudes of pre-Christian theology, the stratosphere in fact of timeless truth, has been attained. No wonder our Lord looked into this Book with a special interest, discerning in this Galilean prophet a forecast of His own world-wide mission, and the symbol of His death and resurrection.²

The writer of Jonah, however, was before his time. To his readers the term "Nineveh" was probably understood as a thinly disguised allusion to Susa, or Ecbatana, or Babylon—to the leading cities of Persia, in fact. When Xenophon led the famous retreat of his Ten Thousand through the country in 400 B.C., he found nothing but a shapeless mound where Nineveh had been. Persia, on the other hand, was a living reality in "Jonah's" day. Doubtless many Persians were attracted by the spirituality of the Jews' religion; but to admit them to the Holy of Holies might have been dangerous, it might have involved that adulteration of the true Faith with insidious foreign superstitions which we call "syncretism." So that probably Ezra and the Ezra-ite schools of scribes and Pharisees were right, at the time, in emphasizing the exclusive legalistic side of Judaism, thus keeping it unspotted from the world.

¹ Acts 10 ³⁴.

² Matt. 12 ³⁹.

JOEL

WITH the reforms of Nehemiah-Ezra the canonical historians of the Old Testament fall suddenly silent. For two hundred years, until it is lifted by the Apocryphal *Book of Maccabees*, a heavy curtain drops on the internal history of Jerusalem and the Jews, and we know very little of what took place. It would seem that towards the long reign of Artaxerxes II. the hearts of the Persians began to harden for some reason or other against the Jews, and the accession of Artaxerxes III. (356 B.C.) was the signal for a Palestinian revolt. In 350 B.C. the rising was ruthlessly suppressed, many of the leading Jews being banished yet once again into exile—this time to Hyrcania by the Caspian Sea. But the empire of Shushan the Palace was now tottering to its fall. Time's revenges were bringing Persia's old antagonist once more upon her track, though now from a new direction. Already the name of Philip of Macedon had become synonymous with ambition and military enterprise, and soon the irresistible phalanxes of Alexander the Great began to batter at the outer gates. Artaxerxes III. was succeeded by Arses in 335 B.C., and he in turn after a brief reign by Darius III., surnamed Codomannus. He was the last of the kings of Persia, the "Great Kings" as they had been called.

Nineveh had fallen; Babylon had fallen; now it was the turn of Susa and Persepolis. In one shattering victory after another—Granicus, Issus, Arbela—Alexander the Great imposed his will upon the Asiatic power, and in 331 B.C. became

the head of the vastest empire the world had ever seen, stretching from the Danube to the Nile, from the Orontes to the Indus.

Alexander himself died an untimely death in 323 B.C., but the Grecian hold was too firm to be shaken off. For a while the empire was torn asunder, as the Greek generals scrambled for their share of the loot. For Palestine, once more become the cock-pit of the powers, all peace was at an end. Ptolemy I. takes Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. Eumenes invades Judah. Antigonus besieges Tyre and Gaza. Palestine is won by Demetrius in one year, only to be seized by Antigonus in the next. The opposing forces resolve themselves into two great rivals, the Ptolemies of Egypt and the Seleucids of Syria. It is a question into which, the frying-pan or the fire, Jerusalem shall ultimately fall.

Meanwhile, the Holy Land is overrun with a most unholy swarm of heathens, speaking an outlandish language, dressing in a way that to the Oriental seemed most indecently undressed, exposing their bodies in revolting games and baths, shaving off their beards, wearing ridiculous hats upon their close-cropped heads, worshipping in their lax and laughing way a crowd of obscene gods and goddesses, mixing promiscuously with their womenfolk as spectators of ribald theatricals, and in a thousand ways offending the deepest susceptibilities of the helpless Jews in their midst. They were like the plagues of Egypt, these swarming, ubiquitous Greeks, these pestilent clouds of Hellenists that darkened the sun like flies. One could not escape from them! On and on they came, wave after wave, in countless multitudes,

plundering, defiling all they touched, penetrating everywhere, endlessly chattering, littering the ground.

In the face of such an invasion, full as it was of a certain Satanic lure through the lust of the eyes and the glitter of novelty, there was need of all the Jews' ancient power of resistance to environment: there was need of a prophet, staunch and fearless as the prophets of old, to stem the corrosive tide.

Read as a voice for such times as these, the words of the prophet Joel the son of Pethuel leap into significance. He is aghast at the portent of these strangers flooding into the land. *Hath this been in your days, or in the days of your fathers?*¹ The Greek invasion is like nothing so much as a plague of locusts. *A nation is come up upon my land, strong, and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he hath the jaw teeth of a great lion.*² . . . *A great people and a strong, there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after them.*³ They are a nation of Philips, Lovers of Horses. *The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so do they run. Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble.*⁴ The serried array of the solid Greek phalanx, that invincible mass formation of spears and shields, is described in unmistakable terms. *A strong people set in battle array. . . . They march every one on his ways, and they break not their ranks. Neither doth one thrust another; they march every one in his path: and they burst through the weapons, and break not off their course.*⁵

1 I².2 I⁶.3 2².4 2⁴.5 2^{5, 7}.

Like a plague of locusts, they devastate all before them. *The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness.*¹ Like locusts, they defile everything they touch, corrupting the land with their lewd Greek morals and their filthy carousing. *They have cast lots for my people: and have given a boy for an harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they might drink.*² For a moment the prophet drops the veil of metaphor, as his heart burns to think of the time-serving treachery of Judah's neighbours: *The children also of Judah and the children of Jerusalem have ye sold unto the sons of the Grecians, that ye might remove them far from their border.*³

The invaders had shown no respect to the religious feelings of their victims, nothing had been too sacred for them to lay their hands upon. *The meal offering and the drink offering is cut off from the house of the LORD; the priests, the LORD'S ministers, mourn.*⁴ . . . *Ye have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried into your temples my goodly pleasant things.*⁵ His heart is wrung with anguish to see the shrines of Zeus and Aphrodite garnished with the treasures stolen from the Lord.

His voice becomes a clarion call to prayer, to repentance for the sins that had brought down this visitation, to the mortification which should wipe away those sins. He calls for a long Lent. *Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly: Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the old men, gather the children. . . . Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to*

¹ 2³.² 3³.³ 3⁶.⁴ 1⁹.⁵ 3⁵.

*reproach, that the nations should rule over them.*¹ But it must be a real, a genuine repentance. *Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God : for he is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth him of the evil.*²

The prophet ends on a note of confidence in the goodness of the Lord. Of the two Greek powers which were treading Palestine underfoot while they struggled with each other for its possession, the Jews infinitely preferred the "King of the South," namely the Dynasty of Ptolemy, King of Egypt.³ From the "King of the North"—that is, the Dynasty of Seleucus or Antiochus, King of Syria—they had nothing to expect but persecution. Joel now promises them that the King of the North shall be defeated. *I will remove far off from you the northern army, and will drive him into a land barren and desolate, his forepart into the eastern sea, and his hinder part into the western sea. . . . Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice.*⁴ The clash of arms shall cease, and all shall be well under the mild and sympathetic rule of Ptolemy. *And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.*⁵

The hopes of the prophet were fulfilled by the victories of Ptolemy I. (Soter) over Seleucus I. (Nicator), which definitely gained possession of Judah for Egypt; and still more fully by the accession of Ptolemy II. (Philadelphus) in 285 B.C., whose reign inaugurated a period of seventy blessed years of peace in Palestine.

¹ 2¹⁵ (Epistle for Ash Wednesday).

³ Daniel II⁵.

⁴ 2²⁰.

² 2¹³.

⁵ 2²⁵.

Under Ptolemy Philadelphus the Jews, not only in Judah but throughout the empire, enjoyed something more than mere toleration. It was under the patronage of this monarch that the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, and a copy of them placed in the royal library at Alexandria. The story goes that he sent to Jerusalem for the loan of six learned scribes from each of the twelve tribes to do the work of translation, and that the seventy-two were so divinely guided that they made not a single mistake. Thus the most ancient of all versions of the Scriptures, the so-called *Septuagint* (Latin for *Seventy*) came into being, and is still used by scholars as evidence for the third-century Hebrew text. In addition to this, it is related that Ptolemy redeemed from slavery every Jew that had been "sold to the sons of the Grecians" throughout his dominion. So that the prophecies of Joel, if this was indeed the age in which he wrote, were well fulfilled.

But even the benevolence of the Ptoleimid government obviously fell far short of bringing to pass that perfect Golden Age of which every prophet continued to dream. Once more the restoration to peace, the repair of Jerusalem, and the cleansing of the Temple from the intrusion of blasphemers had failed to make the land a Paradise. Like the rest of the later prophets, Joel is compelled to look to a yet more distant bourn, and his prophecy ends on the now familiar note of Apocalypse. One of these days the New Jerusalem shall indeed be seen on earth, ushered in by a great Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit of God, which shall make all things new. *It shall*

come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions.¹ . . . And the LORD shall roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be a refuge unto his people, and a strong hold to the children of Israel. So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion my holy mountain.²

¹ 2²⁸ (Acts 2¹⁷).

² 3¹⁶.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

MALACHI, THE THIRD ISAIAH, JONAH, AND JOEL

B.C.

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- | | |
|------|---|
| 516. | DARIUS I., King of Persia.
The Restoration Temple built.
The Prophets <i>Haggai</i> and <i>Zechariah</i> . |
| 490. | Battle of Marathon. |
| 485. | Death of Darius I., King of Persia.
Accession of XERXES, King of Persia. |
| 480. | Complaint to Xerxes about the Jews.
? Esther and Mordecai at Susa. |
| 465. | ARTAXERXES I., King of Persia.
Jews apparently plan to build walls of Jerusalem.
Complaint by Rehum and Shimshai to Susa.
Artaxerxes bids them cease building. |
| 460. | Prophecies of <i>Malachi</i> . |
| 450. | Prophecies of <i>Third Isaiah</i> (<i>Isaiah</i> 65-66; 24-27; 34, 35). |
| 445. | Nehemiah in Susa hears of state of Jerusalem. |
| 444. | He visits the city, and becomes Governor.
In spite of Sanballat, builds the walls. |
| 433. | Nehemiah returns to Persia. |
| 431. | Nehemiah's second visit to Jerusalem.
Cleanses the Temple. Mixed marriages. |
| 424. | DARIUS II., King of Persia. |

B.C.

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408. Egyptians destroy Jewish Temple in Elephantine.
Jews appeal to High Priest Jehohanan of Jerusalem.
And to Bagoas, Persian Governor of Judah.
And to sons of Sanballat in Samaria.
Prophecies of *Jonah*.
404. ARTAXERXES II., King of Persia.
398. Ezra wishes to introduce Law of Moses to Jews.
Visits Jerusalem and reads Law (Priests' Code).
397. Ezra's Reformation.
356. ARTAXERXES III., King of Persia.
Jewish revolt harshly suppressed.
Exiles to Hyrcania.
Rise of Philip of Macedon.
335. ARSES, King of Persia.
Greek war with Persia.
335. DARIUS III. (Codomannus), King of Persia.
Decline of Persia.
334. Persian defeat at Granicus.
332. Also at Issus.
331. Alexander's victory at Arbela makes him master
of the Persian Empire.

THE GREEK PERIOD: JUDAH UNDER THE PTOLEMIES.

331. ALEXANDER THE GREAT, master of the East.
Palestine included in Greek Empire.
323. Death of Alexander.
Rival Greek generals scramble for loot.
PTOLEMY I. (Soter) in Egypt. SELEUCUS I. in Syria.
Prophecies of *Joel*.
Ptolemy I. becomes master of Judæa.
285. PTOLEMY II. (Philadelphus).
Sympathetic rule over Judæa.
The Septuagint Translation made in Alexandria.
246. PTOLEMY III. (Euergetes).
Peace in Palestine.
221. PTOLEMY IV. (Philopater).
War breaks out again with Syria.
205. PTOLEMY V.
Defeated by Syria.
199. Jerusalem falls into the hands of Antiochus III. (The
Great).
Beginning of ill-treatment of the Jews.
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CHAPTER X

DANIEL AND THE SECOND ZECHARIAH

THE last of the historical Books of the Old Testament, namely *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*, bring the history of the Jews up to 398 B.C., then suddenly come to a full stop. Between the Old Testament, therefore, and the New lies a period of no less than four hundred years, which is a veritable no-man's-land for most readers of the Bible. Of the changes wrought in Judaism by the work of Ezra's lawyers and scribes, of the metamorphosis of Palestine through the magic wand of Alexander the Greek, of the incredible persecutions suffered by the Jews in their resistance to the Hellenistic peril, and the amazing successes of the Maccabæan revolt, it is safe to say that most Bible readers are entirely ignorant. In making the enormous leap across the darkness of these four centuries, they have been content to leave the obviously complete change of circumstance and atmosphere as an inexplicable enigma.

Thus they will have noted, without understanding, that all sorts of important factors are taken for granted in the New Testament which have never been even mentioned in the Old: and contrariwise, that many of the most striking features of Old Testament Judaism have now mysteriously vanished away. The ancient Hebrew language, for instance, has been displaced by Aramaic in the quoted words of Christ, or by Greek in the Gospels that speak of Him. His

name, and those of His disciples, are unlike the Old Hebrew names: Joshua has become Jeshua, then Jesu, and finally Jesus. The very map of Palestine has suffered a sea-change—being now sprinkled with most un-Jewish names like Antioch, Tiberias, Ituræa, Decapolis, Cæsarea.

The Temple is still standing in the time of Christ, but it is the Temple of Herod, not of Haggai and Zechariah; while the synagogues are a novel feature of the scene. The Pharisees and Sadducees are new, so are the publicans, Herodians, Zealots, and Grecians, while the Babylonians, Assyrians, and Persians which filled the pages of the Old Testament have disappeared.

It is a very big gap we have to fill, but the study of the *Book of Daniel* will go some way towards it.

Politically, the seventy years which followed Ezra's reformation were troubled and anxious for all the nations of the Near East. The kings of Persia—Artaxerxes III. (356 B.C.), Arses (335 B.C.), and Darius III. (335 B.C.)—must have trembled in their shoes as one breathless courier after another brought them news from the north of an ogre called Philip of Macedon, or a still more terrible portent called Alexander. As the shattering blows of the battles of Granicus, Issus, and Arbela followed one another in rapid succession, and the once all-powerful empire of Persia tottered to its fall, the Jews in Judah, in Egypt, and in Mesopotamia must have wondered how they themselves would fare under the yoke of the Greek invader. Hitherto in all their history it had been merely an exchange of Eastern masters: now it was a peril from unknown and antipathetic *Europe*.

The uncertainty of the times must have driven

home upon the Jews the lessons already learnt in the Exile and its aftermath, namely that the only kingdom worth striving for, the only sovereignty which the vicissitudes of Fate could never touch, was the spiritual Kingdom of God. An earthly Jerusalem, it is true, still seemed a necessity; but to hope for any restoration of an earthly kingdom must, for centuries at least, have been out of the question. Thus all the national energies were bent towards honouring the God of Israel in His Temple, His Priests, and His Law.

Nor did the advent of Alexander the Great seriously interfere with this activity. The man might be a heathen, but he was no unimaginative barbarian. It was in no irreverent spirit that he turned aside from his march through Palestine to visit the famous city of Zion. Alexander died prematurely in 323 B.C., but his policy of tolerance was maintained by the Greek Ptolemies of Egypt, under whose rule the Jews now came, and for the better part of a century Jerusalem enjoyed religious peace.

Their freedom in this respect, however, was marred by the tendency of some of the younger Jews to adulterate the faith of their fathers with the manners of the Greeks. For when it came to a question of culture, the invaders proved most ardent missionaries. The great Aristotle himself had moulded the mind of Alexander, and was still "the master of them that know" when his pupil conquered the world. Intellectually, the "glory that was Greece" had now reached its zenith in the world's esteem, and for a time it seemed as though even the unchanging East would be submerged in the rising tide of Hellenism.

Everywhere Aramaic was displaced in polite society by the language of the conqueror. Ancient place-names were changed: Beth-Shan became Scythopolis, Akko was called Ptolemais, Rabbath-Ammon blossomed out as Philadelphia, and so on. Native-born Syrians became famous as writers in a foreign tongue. Everywhere the building of gymnasiums, swimming baths, theatres, and schools went on apace. The Eastern world awoke to find itself as suddenly Westernized as Japan after the Russo-Japanese War.

But the best of the Jews resisted this insidious encroachment of Paganism to the limit of their power. Jerusalem alone of big cities remained doggedly innocent of gymnasiums or public baths. In Judah the use of Aramaic in the homes and of Hebrew in the Temple still continued. The smiling yet slightly irritated Greeks were kept at arm's length by an obstinate nucleus of die-hard Jews who, in contradistinction to their more easy-going brethren, were called the Hasidim, or Assideans (Puritans). From the marked manner in which they dissociated themselves from the rest, they were afterwards known as Separatists, or Pharisees, and held in very high honour indeed.

Yet the tremendous impact of the Greek Renaissance could not be altogether void of effect even upon the Jews. The century of which we are speaking witnessed a brilliant revival in Jewish literature. Some of it, like the famous *Septuagint* translation of the Old Testament, was even written in Greek. But to the end, no book was ever accepted as worthy of inclusion within the Holy Scriptures unless written in Hebrew, with possibly a chapter or two of Aramaic. It is to this Silver

Age of Jewish literature that we must probably ascribe such canonical books as *Ecclesiastes*, *Esther*, many of the *Psalms* and *Proverbs*, the *Song of Solomon*, and the prophecy of *Joel*. But most of the books written at this time were regarded as only semi-sacred by the orthodox Jews, and assigned to a supplementary volume of the Old Testament called the Apocrypha. Amongst the earliest of these were probably *Tobit*, the early chapters of *Enoch*, and the well-known *Wisdom of Jesus the son of Sirach*, usually called *Ecclesiasticus*. Such was the fertility of the Jews under the benevolent despotism of the Ptolemies of Egypt.

Early in the second century B.C., however, Palestine again experienced a change of masters which brought with it a complete reversal of fortune.

In 199 B.C. Antiochus III. (the Great) of Syria defeated the Egyptians at Panion, and thus gained possession of Jerusalem. At once the city was torn by rival factions. On the one hand were the Hellenizing party anxious to curry favour with the conqueror, and to force their "broad-minded" views upon every department, civil and religious, within the state; on the other side stood the Puritan Assideans, led by the sea-green incorruptible Onias III., High Priest of the Temple. For a time the latter prevailed. When the Greek general Heliodorus attempted to seize the treasures of the Temple, apparently with the encouragement of the Hellenizing party, he was miraculously repulsed, *for there appeared unto him an horse with a terrible rider upon him, which ran fiercely and smote at Heliodorus with his forefeet, and Heliodorus fell suddenly upon the ground.*¹

¹ 2 Maccabees 3²⁵.

But the gathering cyclone broke in earnest on the accession of Antiochus IV. to the throne of Syria in 176 B.C. "Epiphanes"—Illustrious—was what he called himself, but his unhappy subjects were soon calling him "Epimanes," the Madman, because of his insane fury and cruelties, particularly against the Jews. From the first it would seem that he had a special antipathy towards this unbending race, which would neither flatter him nor dissemble their contempt.

Yet there are black sheep in every family, and Epiphanes was quick to scent out such Jews as, basely treacherous, were willing to give him secret support. Chief of these was one Jason, a Hellenizing member of the High Priestly family, who now offered Epiphanes an enormous sum of money if he would make him High Priest in place of the "narrow-minded" Onias III. That a man like Epiphanes should appoint a man like Jason to this sacred and hitherto inviolate office was a terrible shock to the best of the Jews.

But a worse was to come. Three years later, in 172 B.C., an adventurer called Menelaus, who was not even of the High Priestly family, offered Epiphanes a still bigger bribe if he would make him High Priest in place of Jason. When, in addition, he was discovered actually stealing from the Temple, the indignation of the Assideans could no longer be restrained. The old High Priest Onias III. publicly denounced Menelaus and his impious master. Epiphanes in one of his mad rages sent for his captain Andronicus. He, like the murderers of Thomas à Becket, finding the aged prelate in a sanctuary, haled him forth and slew him on the spot.

Having tasted blood, the tiger in Epiphanes quickly became insatiable. In 171 B.C. he began his ambitious campaigns against Egypt, the ill success of which still further infuriated him, and Judah became the madman's whipping-boy. After the abortive campaign of 170 B.C. he returned straight to Jerusalem, profaned the Temple with his heathen presence, robbed it of much of its treasure, and slew out of hand many of the Jews who opposed him.

The anticlimax of his third campaign was still more maddening. This time he had actually penetrated within sight of Alexandria, when the unlooked-for intervention of Rome—now a new star in Near Eastern politics—compelled him to retire. Returning once more to Jerusalem, he found the Jews agog for revolt against his interference with their religious liberties, and refusing to recognize Menelaus as High Priest. This was the last straw! Epiphanes determined to crush "the rebellious and bad city" once and for all.

In 169 B.C. his general Apollonius surprised Jerusalem on a Sabbath day. Thousands of the Jews were massacred in cold blood or sold into slavery. There had been no such misery since the days of Nebuchadrezzar, and many of the more active Jews fled pell-mell into the hills, when they gathered sullenly watchful in the mountain passes and caves of Adullam up and down the country. In Jerusalem itself a Syrian garrison was planted in the citadel overlooking the Temple. Worse still, the practice of the religion of Judaism was altogether interdicted. The Temple worship and the offering of sacrifice to Jehovah was summarily put down, while on the ancient Altar

of Burnt Offering, "the abomination of desolation" (a heathen altar) was erected in honour of gods of Greece. In the following year the persecutions were still continuing unabated. Mothers with circumcised babies at their breasts were hurled from the cliff, Jews were forced at the point of the sword to eat swine's flesh and to do sacrifice to the gods, roving bands of Greek soldiers invaded every house, seized all copies of the Holy Scriptures they could find, and burnt them on a pyre oftentimes side by side with their owners.

It was more than human flesh and blood could stand. The crisis came within a year (167 B.C.). When the officers of Epiphanes came in their circuit to the little village of Modin, calling on the people to sacrifice to the gods, they found an old man, Mattathias, standing by the altar with his stalwart sons, Simon, Judas, Jonathan, and two more. These were the famous "Maccabees," for Judas was afterwards called Maccabæus, the Hammer, and his brothers inherited the name. As they traced their descent back to one Hashmon the priest, their line is often called the Hashmonean, or Asmonean, Dynasty.

The Maccabæan revolt began when Mattathias defied the king's officer in a loud voice: *We will not hearken to the king's words, to go from our religion, either on the right hand or the left.*¹ Scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when a sycophantic Jew rushed forward to offer the requisite sacrifice. Then was the old man "inflamed with zeal, neither could he forbear to show his anger,"² and seizing a sword he slew the traitor on the spot. At once all was in an uproar. The

¹ 1 Maccabees 2 22.

² 1 Maccabees 2 24.

king's commissioner was cut down, the heathen altar destroyed, and Mattathias, calling upon all who were "zealous of the law" to follow him, rushed to the safety of the mountains, where thousands of his desperate fellow-countrymen quickly joined him. It was war to the death, a Holy War against the Infidel!

Mattathias died in the following year (166 B.C.), but under his son Judas Maccabæus the success of the rebellion was quickly assured.

DANIEL

It is amazing to read how completely the guerilla forces of Maccabæus outwitted and overcame the picked troops of Epiphanes. Consummate leadership in itself cannot account for the magnificent drive and impetus of the Jewish forces which, poorly equipped and untrained for war, discomfited the chariots and phalanxes of Greece. What made the rebels so irresistible was their fierce resentment against the tyrant, their long pent-up sense of national pride, and above all their zeal for the House of the Lord. In after times it was precisely such men as these who, in rebellion then against the oppression of Rome, were called Zealots, or Cananæans. The Maccabæan revolt seemed at first a forlorn hope, so few and ill-equipped were the Jews: but it turned out even as Judas is reported to have said, *The victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host: but strength cometh from heaven.*¹

Nor did Israel fail of a prophet in her hour of need. Among the Assideans, perhaps, who flocked

¹ 1 Maccabees 3¹⁹.

to the standard of Mattathias was one who wrote that most stirring call to steadfast faith and courage in adversity, the *Book of Daniel*. Of the writer himself we know nothing certain. He may have been a young soldier, like the historian Josephus, laying down his sword between battles to take up the still mightier pen. Or he may have been a sympathizer too old for combatant service, finding his hour when the warriors gathered round the camp fires at the close of day. Then would he tell them his impassioned stories of the heroes of the past, of the goodness of the Lord to those who trust in Him, and of the glorious future in store for faithful Israel.

He was never officially reckoned as a prophet by the Jews,¹ but a prophet he was in the truest sense. Though he preached as one born out of due time, though he spoke not in Biblical Hebrew but in the Aramaic vernacular of the rank and file, though in the absence of books of reference in those troublous times his memory was sometimes at fault about the history of the past, though he couched his message in the form of picturesque stories and parables to hold the attention of his rough soldiers—yet was this Jewish Peter the Hermit also among the prophets of Israel.

Like one of the old-time prophets—like Ezekiel and the Second Isaiah of the Exile in particular—he bade his hearers remain steadfast in their loyalty to Jehovah, shunning all temptations to

¹ The Book of Daniel was not included by the Jews among the "Prophets," but among the "Writings" of the Old Testament. It was evidently written originally in Aramaic throughout, but as it stands in the Hebrew Bible to-day most of it has been translated into Hebrew to qualify it for admission to the Scriptures.

bow down in the temple of Zeus or Apollo (the modern counterparts of Bel and Nebo), and disdaining all perils which might intimidate them into following the path of apostasy. It would have been easy, when the nights grew cold and food was short, to desert to the valleys where the offering of sacrifice to the gods of Greece would have secured a ready pardon. It was hard, with the threat of death over one's head, to be true to a mere ideal. Yet the prophet in his quaint yet unmistakable way holds his hearers to their allegiance, faithful, if need be, unto death.

To achieve his object he wrote what we should call to-day an historical allegory, very much in the spirit of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Around the name of a popular hero called Daniel, well known among the exiles in Babylon, had gathered a number of picturesque traditions. These the Maccabæan prophet gathers up, adopts to his present purpose, and presents in the *Book of Daniel*. No doubt one motive for disguising his message in this romantic way was the desire to conceal its meaning from the casual eye of the unbeliever. Had a copy of the Book fallen into the hands of a Greek officer, he would have regarded it as merely a "period novel," without detecting the bitter satire against Epiphanes.

According to the story, Daniel was one of the captives taken by Nebuchadrezzar to Babylon after the surrender of Jerusalem in 597 B.C., along with the "Three Children" Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. In the opening narrative of their staunch resistance to the heathen environment of Babylon, the *motif* of the Book at once appears. Daniel refuses to break the Law of Moses by

eating food forbidden to Jews. *Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's meat.*¹ We can imagine the hearts of the Maccabæan soldiers throbbing with vicarious pride as they hear of their fellow-countrymen's loyalty and courage. In just the same way had many refused to eat the swine's flesh forced upon them by Epiphanes, "that they might not be defiled with meats," and had died a martyr's death.²

Then the prophet tells how Nebuchadrezzar had a dream of a colossal image with members of various kinds of metal, which was smashed to pieces in the end by a little "stone cut without hands." As the details of the dream unfold, the soldiers realize that it is a kind of cryptogram concealing the actual events of past history. The "Image" is World-Power; its "Head of Gold" is obviously Babylon; "Breast and Arms of Silver" are the Anshan and Media of Cyrus; its "Body of Brass" is Persia; its "Legs of Iron" are the Macedonia of Alexander; its "Feet of Iron and Clay" are the Greek kingdoms of Egypt and Syria, the latter of course including Epiphanes; while finally—O happy omen!—the "Little Stone" which shall smash the lot is this very army of Judas the Hammer!³ It is a prophecy of triumph to warm the cockles of any soldier's heart. Israel is going to win! *In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed.*⁴

Next night, the prophet has a still more exciting story for them. Nebuchadrezzar—every armour-bearer knows by now that Epiphanes is meant—set up a heathen idol in the "Plain of Dura"

¹ I 8.² I Maccabees I 63.³ 2 32.⁴ 2 44.

(Modin, of course!), and bade everyone offer sacrifice to it. The "Three Children" (Simon, Judas, and Jonathan, perhaps?) refuse at once. *Be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*¹ Every soldier's head turns to where the sons of Mattathias are sitting. How well they could picture that defiance-flashing eye and the anger of the tyrant! *Then was Nebuchadrezzar full of fury*—just like Epimanes!—and cast the brave fellows into a burning fiery furnace, so hot that it burnt up the servants who held them. With bated breath the soldiers wait to hear what will happen next. And sure enough, the God of Israel saved the Three Children miraculously from the flames, *that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.*² What a story to give a man confidence in the God of Israel!

Then came a weird story about a proud tyrant named Belshazzar, the last prince of Babylon. As he sat at a luxurious banquet amongst his courtiers, eating and drinking out of the sacred vessels stolen from the Temple of the Lord, suddenly on the plastered wall of the banqueting hall appeared the fingers of a man's hand, just a hand all by itself writing on the wall! And it wrote the mystic words MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN, which Daniel explained to mean, *God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end: thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting: thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.* And Belshazzar was slain the same night.³ The Maccabæan refugees could almost see a ghostly hand moving over the wall

¹ 3¹⁸.² 3²⁸.³ 5²⁶.

of their cave in the flickering light of the dying fire. The doom of Epiphanes was writ large in their hearts at least.

What a man that Daniel was—a typical Jew ! It was easy to guess what he would have done, had he lived in these latter days, when the Faith of Israel was forbidden, her Holy Books destroyed, her Temple desecrated, her sacrifices ceased, and even to offer a prayer to Jehovah was a crime ! What did he do, as a matter of fact, under similar circumstances in the Babylonian affliction ? Listen to the prophet: *He went into his house ; (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem ;) and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.*¹ Exactly ! Just what the faithful followers of Maccabæus had done, and intended to do, so help them God ! And many of them had met a martyr's death as the price of their fidelity. Even so the prophet related how Daniel had faced death at the lion's mouth. No story in the Scriptures has struck the imagination of all ages more forcibly than that of Daniel in the Lions' Den—how he was shut up all night with the wild beasts, yet how on the next morning he was taken up out of the den, *and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God.*²

The prophet of the rebellion became more and more encouraging as the weeks grew into months and the inspired rebels won victory upon victory over the forces of Epiphanes. The unknown author who afterwards wrote the history of these crowded years in the *First Book of Maccabees* well

remembered the invaluable help which these visions of Daniel had given to Judas. *Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, by believing were saved out of the flame*, he quotes from the book, and *Daniel for his innocency was delivered from the mouth of lions*. And thus consider ye throughout all ages, that none that put their trust in him shall be overcome.¹ In this spirit the Hammer defeated Apollonius, and, despoiling the Grecian general of his sword, used it against the Greeks for the rest of his life. In the same spirit, reminding one of the Scotch Covenanters of a later age, the resolute Jews prayed over their open Bible, sang their Psalms of David, and swarmed down from their mountain fastnesses to outmanœuvre and discomfit their unwieldy adversaries in the glens and passes of Judah. Thus one by one every Greek leader sent against them—Seron, Gorgias, Nicanor, the field-marshal Lysias himself—was beaten, and eventually it remained only to seize Jerusalem itself from the garrison which manned the citadel.

A new note is now heard in the voice of the prophet as he cheers his companions on the road to victory. He is no longer the footsore follower of a harried guerilla band, driven from crag to crag, lurking in the shadows of some desolate ravine, scarcely daring to light a camp fire save in the depths of some well-guarded cavern. He is the mahdi of a conquering army. Their spears shine proudly in the sun, their night fires are beacons of hope to a hundred villages praying for their success. There is a note of confidence and exultation in the prophet's voice answering to the light of

¹ 1 Maccabees 2⁵⁹.

triumph in the soldiers eyes. Gone is the Daniel of the first six chapters of his Book, the forlorn exile daring to stand alone, bullied, tormented, the plaything of death. A new Daniel takes his place, no longer concerned with burning fiery furnaces and dens of lions, but a Daniel who floats on the magic carpet of his dreams up into the presence of Eternity itself.

Time is annihilated in the visions of Daniel now. The distant past and the still more distant future lie spread out before him all in one, a sunlit panorama of the world as God has willed it from the beginning to the end. Everything falls into its place as the fulfilment of the Divine purpose. The prophet, still speaking in the character of Daniel, now reveals how step by step the past has led to the present, and the present shall lead to a yet more glorious future, when *the kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High : his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.*¹

There is an apocalyptic atmosphere about the visions now. Daniel is carried up into the presence of God Himself, and describes his overwhelming impressions of the majesty of the Most High in terms which later on became the model, as it were, of all apocalypse even to the Revelation of St. John. *I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit : his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool ; . . . thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before*

him: the judgement was set, and the books were opened.¹ For the first time in the Scriptures some of the heavenly host are named: we hear of the angel Gabriel as the divinely sent interpreter of the dreams: *Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision.*² And the archangel Michael appears as *the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people.*³

At the end of all things the visions perceive the advent of a dim figure which shall be the incarnate embodiment of all that is best in man. Though not yet seen clearly as an individual, the nebulous form of Daniel's Messiah already contains within it much that will eventually come to clearer definition as the Son of Man and Saviour of the world. Thus many of the expressions used in the *Book of Daniel* were taken up by later apocalyptic writers, and adopted by our Lord Himself, as the distinctive titles of His Divine Person. *After the three-score and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off,* we read, and in another place, *the anointed one, the prince,*⁴ where "the Anointed One" might equally have been translated *The Messiah*, as indeed it is in the margin of the Revised Version.

But the phrase or title upon which the piety of subsequent ages chiefly fastened as the most significant of all was Daniel's "Son of Man." *I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man, and he came even to the ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom.*⁵ . . . During the next hundred years the phrase "Son of Man" became quite frequently a title of the

¹ 7⁹.² 8¹⁶.³ 12¹.⁴ 9²⁶.⁵ 7¹³.

Messiah. even more unequivocal than "Son of God," so that when our Lord spoke of Himself so consistently as the Son of Man, many of the Jews suspected at once that He was "making Himself equal with God."

In all these apocalyptic visions, nothing could have been of more comfort to the soldiers of Maccabæus than the confident promise held out to them of a life beyond the grave. However successful the issue of battle, it must needs be that some should die. It was unthinkable that a soldier who had laid down his life for his God, to say nothing of a martyr who had been faithful unto death, should be deprived of his reward, any more than that an apostate dying comfortably in his bed should escape his just punishment. Daniel reassures his hearers on this point. Perhaps the earliest of the prophets of Israel to foresee an individual judgement on the Last Day, he anticipates that promise of personal immortality upon which the resurrection of Jesus set its final seal. *At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.*¹

But the apocalyptic element in the *Book of Daniel* must not be allowed to disguise from us its strictly practical nature. The hand that holds the pen may be the hand of the story-teller or the dreamer of dreams, but the voice is the voice of a prophet, a prophet of the old school of Isaiah or Jeremiah, a prophet whose feet are firmly set on the earth, however high his head may be among

the clouds. Isaiah or Jeremiah would certainly not have expressed themselves in the same way, but there is the same underlying spirit, the desire to apply the teaching of religion to the practical needs of the present. Daniel is not preoccupied, be it observed, solely by the military success of his hearers, nor in one-sided denunciation of the tyranny of Epiphanes. He does not fail to point out in the authentic tones of prophecy that it is Israel's own sins which have brought this suffering upon her. *I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made confession, and said, . . . We have sinned, and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly.*¹ No doubt the soldiers did not care much for this part of his message, but he insisted on their listening. *Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name.*² He gave it them "straight from the shoulder," as we should say, yet at the same time assuring them of God's mercy to the penitent. *To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses; for we have rebelled against him; neither have we obeyed the voice of the LORD our God, to walk in his laws, which he set before us.*³

His visions, though apocalyptic in language, now describe in scarcely disguised detail the course of recent history and the imminent ruin of Epiphanes. He sees, for instance, the vision of a Ram with Two Horns, *one higher than the other, and the higher came up last*—evidently the Medes and Persians. *Then an he-goat came from the west over the face of the whole earth*—the Greek invasion—and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes—Alexander the Great. And the Goat

¹ 9⁴.² 9⁶.³ 9⁹.

cast the Ram down to the ground, as Alexander had cast down the Persians. But eventually *the great horn was broken*—Alexander died—and instead *there came up four notable horns*—the Greek kingdoms of Egypt, Syria, Thrace, and Macedon, into which Alexander's empire was divided.¹

And out of one of them came forth a little horn, which waxed exceeding great—here the listeners would wink knowingly at the allusion to Epiphanes himself. The "little horn" attacked even *the host of heaven* (the priests of the Temple), *even to the prince of the host* (the High Priest); *and it took away from him the continual burnt offering, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down . . . and it cast down truth to the ground*,² even as Epiphanes had done. Then in the vision appears Gabriel—shining Captain of the Angels—and comforts the dreamer with an assurance that the wicked little horn shall have an end: *he shall be broken without hand*.³ Epiphanes did die, in fact, not at the hand of his many enemies, but of a broken heart caused by the collapse of his power.⁴

A curious feature of the Book is the military precision with which God's plan of campaign is worked out, as it were, to the last zero hour. Thus the angel assures Daniel that the profanation of the Temple shall last *unto two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings*; *then shall the sanctuary be cleansed*,⁵ that is to say 1,150 days, or three years and two months. In another place the same period is described as *a time and times and half a time*,⁶ or *a time, times, and an half*,⁷ or from a

¹ 8 5ff.² 8 11.³ 8 25.⁴ 1 Maccabees 6.⁵ 8 14.⁶ 7 25.⁷ 12 7.

slightly different starting point *a thousand two hundred and ninety days*.¹ All these indications clearly point to the period of three years (168-165 B.C.) during which the Temple worship was, as a matter of historical fact, suspended until its restoration by Maccabæus. Much more puzzling, however, is the interpretation of the numerals in Daniel's vision of the "seventy weeks of years" (*i.e.* 490 years) which must elapse before the final deliverance of the world from the powers of evil.² At one time this was thought to be a prediction of our Saviour—there are roughly 490 years between the building of the Restoration Temple and the Birth of Christ (516-5 B.C.)—but prevision of this type is never claimed by the prophets of Israel. The number 490 is intended, like the "seventy times seven" of our Lord's command to forgive,³ as portending a period almost immeasurably longer than the "seventy years" foretold by Jeremiah for the captivity.⁴ The Babylonian Exile of 597 B.C. was not, in a spiritual sense, ended until in 164 B.C. (433 years later) Judas Maccabæus re-dedicated the Altar of Sacrifice in the Temple.

As a matter of history, the rebels finally defeated the Greek field-marshal at Beth-zur in 165 B.C. Judas immediately entered Jerusalem, drove out his enemies, and fortified the walls. The heathen altar set up by Epiphanes, known as the "abomination of desolation," was destroyed, and the Temple purified. Finally, the altar of Jehovah was re-dedicated, and once more after a suspension of three years the sacrifices ordained by the Law

¹ 12 11.³ Matt. 18 22.² 9 24.⁴ Jeremiah 29 10.

of Moses were renewed. A little later, the prophecies of Daniel were signally fulfilled in the death of Antiochus Epiphanes himself.

THE SECOND ZECHARIAH

THE prophet who wrote the *Book of Daniel* was not the only spiritual leader, we may be sure, to preach the holy war of Judas Maccabæus against the infidel Greek. Belonging to this period is undoubtedly the unknown prophet whom we speak of as "The Second Zechariah," for the reason that his extant utterances are appended to the Book of that name (*Zechariah* 9-14). His prophecy is the most difficult of any to understand, partly owing to his fondness for allusions doubtless plain enough to his contemporaries, but exceedingly obscure to us, and partly owing to unfortunate corruptions in the text.

The prophet foretells, like "Daniel," the success of the Maccabæan revolt. *I will stir up thy sons, O Zion, against thy sons, O Greece, and will make thee as the sword of a mighty man. . . . The LORD of hosts shall defend them.*¹ He foresees also the recapture and cleansing of the Temple. *I will encamp about mine house against the army, that none pass through or return: and no oppressor shall pass through them any more: for now have I seen with mine eyes.*² The entry of Judas Maccabæus into Jerusalem is described in words familiar to us through the Gospel story of Christ's entry into the same city two centuries later. The Saviour of Israel enters not proudly in a warlike chariot, but humbly as a Prince of Peace. *Rejoice greatly,*

¹ 9¹³⁻¹⁵.

² 9⁸.

*O daughter of Zion ; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem : behold, thy king cometh unto thee : he is just, and having salvation ; lowly, and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass.*¹

The Second Zechariah, however, lived to see many years of bitter disappointment. In spite of the recapture of Jerusalem, Judas Maccabæus did not have it all his own way on the battle-field. After suffering defeat at the hands of his old antagonist Lysias, he was finally killed by Bacchides at Elasa in 161 B.C. His death was the signal for renewed intrigue, and one Alcimus by the intervention of the Greeks was appointed to the powerful and lucrative position of High Priest. Judas, however, had been succeeded by his brother Jonathan, who in the end, by taking adroit advantage of rivalries among the Greeks, got himself officially recognized not only as Governor, but as High Priest of Jerusalem. The Asmonean Dynasty was thus firmly established both as a religious and a civil power; and this theocratic system of government by the High Priest continues hereafter for the better part of a century. Thus on the death of Jonathan in 142 B.C. his brother Simon was at once recognized by the Greeks as Governor and High Priest of Jerusalem.

But in the meantime, the stricter Jews of the Assidean class were uneasy at this continual appeal by the priests for Gentile support. The end might be good, but the means savoured of disloyalty to Jehovah. One after another, adventurers like Jason, Menelaus, and Alcimus had bribed themselves into the holiest office in Jewry, and now the Maccabæan brothers were almost

¹ 9⁹ (Matt. 21⁵).

descending to the same tactics. On the other hand, there were many who in a more easy-going way supported the priests or sons of Zadok in thus making the best of both worlds—the Zadokites or Sadducees they began to be called—but the Assideans or Pharisees never ceased to protest.

The Second Zechariah was of the Pharisees. He looks on them as the faithful remnant in back-sliding Israel: *I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried.*¹ The Sadducees are supporting an evil cause. Speaking of Jason, Alcimus, and Menelaus the Lord saith, *I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul also loathed me.*² The priests of to-day are hireling shepherds. *Thus saith the LORD my God: Feed the flock of slaughter; whose possessors slay them, and hold themselves not guilty; and they that sell them say, Blessed be the LORD, for I am rich: and their own shepherds pity them not.*³ . . . The High Priest himself is engrossed in the things of this world. *Lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek those that be scattered, nor heal that that is broken. . . . Woe to the worthless shepherd that leaveth the flock!*⁴

The Sadducees uphold the hireling shepherds, and do well out of it: they are rich and pay their priestlings well.⁵ The Pharisees, on the contrary, who alone give ear to the voice of "Zechariah" (*the poor of the flock that gave heed to me*)⁶ are poor in the treasures of this world, and poor are the wages they pay. *They weighed for my hire thirty pieces of silver*⁷—the price of a slave! Even that

¹ 13⁹. ² 11⁸. ³ 11⁴. ⁴ 11¹⁶. ⁵ 11⁵. ⁶ 11¹¹. ⁷ 11¹².

small offering the prophet is bidden by the Lord to refuse: the priests can have that too if they like! *The LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter, the goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them unto the potter, in the house of the LORD.*¹

The prophet was no doubt easier in his mind, however, when Simon the Maccabee was confirmed by a general council of the Jews in his office of hereditary High Priest, thus holding it with full "canonical" authority. Perhaps the latest historical reference in these chapters is a lament for the assassination of Simon by Antiochus VII. in 135 B.C. *They shall look unto me whom they have pierced: and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn.*²

In such evil days, the only consolation of the prophet was that apocalyptic vision of a distant happiness which had consoled so many of his disappointed brethren in the past. Nothing in fact could really fulfil the desire of all the ages, save the coming of God Himself into His world, and we can see now that the Second Zechariah, like the rest, prophesied more than he knew. *In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.*³ . . . *And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, . . . and the LORD my God shall come, and all the holy ones with thee. . . . It shall come to pass, that at evening time there shall be light. And it shall come to pass in that day,*

¹ 11¹³ (Matt. 27³). ² 12¹⁰ (John 19³⁷). ³ 13¹.

*that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem, . . . and the LORD shall be king over all the earth : in that day shall the LORD be one, and his name one.*¹

The Second Zechariah was the last of the Old Testament prophets. For hundreds of years the members of this sacred profession had played a leading part in the shaping of Israel's destinies; and as in the past each national emergency had fanned the embers of inspiration into flame, so the tumultuous era of the Maccabæan revolt had found its spiritual protagonists in "Daniel" and the "Second Zechariah." But it was a last leap of flame from ashes which had been growing cold for a century or more.

Since the days of Ezra, in fact, the mantle of Elisha had never sat easily on the shoulders of his successors. The cult of the Law of Moses as set forth in elaborate detail by Ezra's completed Pentateuch had clamped a cast-iron mould of legalism upon the Jews. The Law had come to be regarded as the perfect expression of the Will of God for His people: the very roll of parchment upon which it was written, and every jot and tittle of the writing, were sacred beyond cavil or improvement. There was room, perhaps, for rabbis and lawyers and scribes to expound the Law, and to apply it to such new problems as might arise. But there was now no need at all for any further recourse to individuals claiming a special revelation from on high. The prophets had served as tutors to lead men to the Law, but now their work was done.

What indeed was there left for a prophet to do or say? There was no sin, whether spiritual or

¹ 14^{4ff.}

moral, that was not already sufficiently condemned in the Five Books of the Law. No man speaking by the Spirit of God could say that the Law was in any sense defective. In any case, most of the old sins which had so rightly provoked the anger of the prophets—idolatry, national apostasy, wholesale immorality—were things of the past. True, there might still be room for exhortation to a better practical observance of the Law, but, as Blunt¹ points out, “indignation against slack churchmanship does not possess the same spiritual driving power as is possessed by indignation against aggressive wickedness.” A preacher of sermons, in other words, is not necessarily a prophet.

From the time of Ezra, therefore, prophecy lay under a cloud, and the few who ventured to claim a direct personal revelation of the Divine were regarded with indifference or suspicion. That the voice of prophecy was not altogether suppressed even at this time, we know from several scattered paragraphs and chapters inserted by later editors at various points in the Roll of the Prophets. They bear no name nor other distinguishing mark, but it is clear from the internal evidence of style and subject-matter that they emanate from the Greek or Maccabæan age. Probably the words of these anonymous prophets would not have survived at all had they not been fathered, as it were, upon some older prophet of undisputable reputation—such, for instance, as Isaiah or Zechariah.

The “Second Zechariah” seems to realize only too clearly that his lot is cast in the twilight of the prophets. His prevision of the future foresees

¹ A. W. F. Blunt, *The Prophets of Israel*.

the time when the prophets of Israel shall indeed be without honour in their own country. *I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land, saith the Lord, And it shall come to pass that, when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live ; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD : and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision.*¹

Such was the swan-song of Hebrew prophecy. With the passing of the Second Zechariah about 130 B.C. the spirit of Elijah breathes no more over the land, until at long last it breaks forth again in "*the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make ye ready the way of the Lord.*"²

¹ 13².

² Matt. 3³.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

DANIEL AND THE SECOND ZECHARIAH

B.C.

-
199. ANTIOCHUS III. (THE GREAT) defeats Ptolemy V. at Panion, and Syria thus becomes master of Palestine. Jewish affliction begins.
186. SELEUCUS IV. (PHILOPATER) sends Heliodorus to seize Temple treasures.
175. ANTIOCHUS IV. (EPIPHANES) succeeds to the throne. Jason intrigues against Onias III., and purchases High Priesthood.
172. Menelaus outbids Jason for High Priesthood.
171. Onias III. murdered in Egypt by Epiphanes. First Campaign of Epiphanes against Egypt.
170. Second ditto. Epiphanes despoils Temple. Kills Jews.
169. Third Campaign against Egypt. Ordered off by Rome. Jews refuse to recognize Menelaus. Apollonius takes Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Massacre of Jews. Interdict of Judaism.
168. "Abomination of Desolation" in Temple.
167. MATTATHIAS leads revolt at Modin.

The Book of Daniel, 1-6.

166. JUDAS MACCABÆUS defeats Apollonius and Seron. Wins victory at Emmaus.
165. Defeats Lysias at Beth-zur, and re-enters Jerusalem.

The Book of Daniel, 7-end.

- Re-dedication of Altar of Sacrifice.
164. Death of Epiphanes.
163. Judas defeated by Lysias at Beth-zachariah.
162. Lysias makes armistice. Religious freedom of Jews conceded. Alcimus intrigues for High Priesthood.
161. Judas Maccabæus killed at Elasa. Alcimus now High Priest.
- JONATHAN MACCABÆUS succeeds Judas.
150. Alexander Balas makes Jonathan High Priest and Governor.

B.C.

-
- 143. Jonathan killed by Tryphon.
SIMON MACCABÆUS succeeds him.
 - 142. Demetrius recognizes him as High Priest and Governor.
Political independence of Jews conceded.
 - 141. Assembly of Jews officially appoint Simon as High Priest and Governor.
 - 135. Simon assassinated by Antiochus Sidetes.
JOHN HYRCANUS his son succeeds him.
Forcible conversion of Edom (Idumæa) to Judaism.

Prophecy of the Second Zechariah, 9-end.

Hyrcanus opposed by the "Pharisees," now so named.
"Sadducees" support him.

- 104. ARISTOBULUS I., son of Hyrcanus, called "King of the Jews."
- 103. ALEXANDER JANNAEUS, brother of Aristobulus.
Friend of Cleopatra.
- 89. Crucifies 800 Pharisees.
- 81. Appoints Antipater I. Governor of Idumæa.
- 78. ALEXANDRA (Salome), his widow, Queen of the Jews.
Supported by Pharisees.
- 69. ARISTOBULUS II. quarrels with Hyrcanus II.
- 63. Appeals to Pompey, the Roman general.

ROMAN PERIOD.

- 63. Pompey enters Jerusalem.
Makes Hyrcanus II. "Ethnarch" and High Priest.
With Antipater II. as Chief Adviser.
 - 48. ANTIPATER makes his son Herod Governor of Galilee.
 - 41. Success of Antigonous the Pretender.
 - 40. Romans appoint Herod "King of the Jews."
 - 37. HEROD (THE GREAT) takes Jerusalem.
Becomes *de facto* King of the Jews.
 - 29. Octavian (Augustus) extends Herod's kingdom.
Herod's Temple started.
 - 5. Birth of Jesus Christ.
 - 4. Death of Herod the Great.
-

LIST OF BOOKS RECOMMENDED FOR FURTHER STUDY

HEBREW HISTORY in general: G. W. Wade's *Old Testament History* (Methuen, 1900, 8s. 6d.) is still one of the most readable, sufficiently up-to-date, and with exceptionally full references to the Bible itself. W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson's *History of Israel* (Oxford University Press, 1932, 25s.) is scientific, full, and abreast with the most recent research. For a review of the archæological discoveries bearing on the subject, S. L. Caiger's *Bible and Spade* (Oxford University Press, 1936, 5s.) may be consulted.

COMMENTARIES on the text of the individual Prophets in the *Century Bible* (T. C. Jack, c. 1908, 3s. 6d. each) are convenient, cheap, and excellently done—viz., *Isaiah* (2 vols.), by O. C. Whitehouse; *Jeremiah* (2 vols.), by A. S. Peake; *Ezekiel*, by W. F. Loft-house; *The Minor Prophets*, vol. i., by S. R. Driver; vol. ii., by R. F. Horton.

COMPENDIUMS, such as C. Gore's *New Commentary* (S.P.C.K., 1928, 16s.) and J. Hasting's *One-Volume Dictionary of the Bible* (T. and T. Clark, 1909, 24s.), are also very handy and useful.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM, the scientific examination of the authenticity, integrity, and dates of the Biblical writings, may be studied in S. R. Driver's *Literature of the Old Testament* (T. and T. Clark, 1898, 15s.), still a standard book, and W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson's *Old Testament Literature* (S.P.C.K., 1934, 10s. 6d.), which exhibits in attractive form the most recent results of the Higher Criticism.

USEFUL BOOKS on a smaller scale are: G. Philip's *Bible Atlas* (S.P.C.K., 1930, 1s.), A. W. F. Blunt's *Israel in World History*, and *The Prophets of Israel* (Oxford University Press, 1927 and 1929, 2s. 6d. each).

FINALLY, it may not be superfluous to remind the student that the *Bible* itself, preferably a large-type Revised Version with full marginal references, is quite indispensable.

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